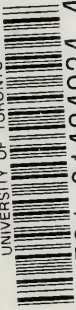


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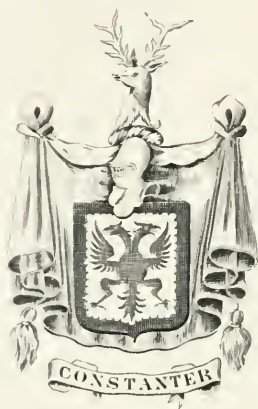
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**WAYLAND**  
**ON**  
**HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY**

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THE

LIMITATIONS

OF

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.

BY FRANCIS WAYLAND.

—  
“NON OMNES POSSUMUS OMNIA.”

—  
BOSTON:  
GOULD, KENDALL AND LINCOLN.  
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## CONTENTS.

---

### SECTION FIRST.

	Page
THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT, - - - - -	1

### SECTION SECOND.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY, - - - - -	12
--------------------------------------	----

### SECTION THIRD.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY, (continued) - - -	26
--	----

### SECTION FOURTH.

PERSECUTION ON ACCOUNT OF RELIGIOUS OPINIONS, -	43
---	----

### SECTION FIFTH.

PROPAGATION OF TRUTH, - - - - -	66
---------------------------------	----

### SECTION SIXTH.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS, - - - - -	90
-----------------------------------	----

### SECTION SEVENTH.

ECCLESIASTICAL ASSOCIATIONS, - - - - -	120
--	-----

### SECTION EIGHTH.

OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY, - - - - -	148
------------------------------------	-----

### SECTION NINTH.

THE SLAVERY QUESTION, - - - - -	161
---------------------------------	-----





# HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY.

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## SECTION FIRST.

### THE NATURE OF THE SUBJECT.

It is a common remark, that, whenever it has been thought necessary to arouse the mind of man to enterprizes of great pith and moment, the appeal has always been made to his moral sentiments. Hence, among the most ancient nations, it was the invariable custom to accompany the declaration of war with religious ceremonies. And if, in later times, this custom has become somewhat less usual, the change itself, in a more remarkable manner, illustrates the tendency of our nature. Wars, at present, are sometimes *commenced*, as in the time of the French Revolution, for the acquisition of national glory. This motive is sufficiently powerful to excite men to action, so long as they may reasonably hope for an easy victory, and an abundance of plunder. But let victory declare for the assailed, let the invader become the invaded, let it become neces-

sary to stimulate men to put forth the highest effort of human daring, and the sacred names of conscience, of duty to family, to country, and to God, are universally invoked, and the Supreme Being is urgently appealed to, to succour the cause of a sinking commonwealth. It is perhaps worth while to remark, in passing, that this consciousness of right is a source of power which belongs specially to the oppressed, and which, other things being equal, will always ensure to them the victory. And, when other things are not equal, it is frequently sufficient, of itself, to outweigh a vast preponderance of physical force. It is, moreover, efficient, in proportion to the purity of the moral principle of a people. We hence perceive the elements of superiority, which, by the constitution of our nature, have been bestowed upon virtue.

Another illustration of the power of the moral principle is seen in the sentiments with which we contemplate the character of confessors, martyrs, and men of every age, who have sacrificed every thing else for the sake of adherence to principle. The highest glory of human nature is to love right better than life, and to obey the dictates of conscience at every conceivable hazard. Even falsehood, when sealed with blood, acquires, not unfrequently, for a time, an irrepressible

power. Truth, when uttered from the stake or on the scaffold, becomes absolutely irresistible. We *admire* Plato surrounded by listening princes, and vieing with them in oriental magnificence ; but we *venerate* Socrates in his dungeon, patiently suffering death for holding forth the truth ; and the dictates of our own bosoms spontaneously assign to him the highest place among the uninspired teachers of wisdom. Or, to turn to more awful examples ; the foundations of the Christian religion were laid in blood. The Captain of our salvation “ was obedient unto death, the death of the cross.” The martyrdoms of the early age of the church gave to the world examples of the love of right, of which it had never before conceived even the possibility, and thus set on foot a moral reformation, which is destined to work in the character of man an universal transformation.

But we need go to no external sources to learn the power of the moral principle. Every man *feels* it to be supreme. Every man who is not utterly lost to self-respect, feels himself insulted if you present before him any inducement to do what he knows to be wrong, or to leave undone what he acknowledges to be right. The veriest villain never dares to trust the sentiments of an accomplice to such an issue. He begins by benumbing or bewildering his moral sensibilities.

It is not until the voice of conscience is silenced that he can urge another to a deed of blood. And, in short, every one feels that he *must* do what his conscience commands, and that he *must not* do what his conscience forbids, all things else to the contrary notwithstanding: he feels too that the word *must*, in this case, expresses a form of obligation more distinctly and peculiarly *imperative* than in any other of which he can conceive. We do not say that the consciences of men are all equally well informed, or that they decide in all cases with equal accuracy. All we say is, that such is the authority of this impulse, whenever it is distinctly perceived.

If such be the power of the moral impulse, we can easily foresee the consequences which must result from its receiving a wrong direction. The man feels that he *must* obey his conscience at all hazards. No motives of wisdom, or prudence, or advantage, or loss, can be allowed to come into competition with this, the supreme authority of his being. Nay, more, he must devote his whole intellectual and physical power to the accomplishment of the purpose to which he is urged by the voice of God, thus speaking in his own bosom. But if unfortunately he have misinterpreted this voice, the whole power of the man is enlisted in the work of mischief. He bids defiance to hu-

man law, on principle. Consequences to himself not only, but specially to others, are as nothing. Opposition, by convincing him the more strongly of his own rectitude and of the wickedness of others, only renders him the more ferocious. Thus it comes to pass that evil of every kind is stimulated into activity by the very principle which God ordained to be the antagonist of all evil. It curls the lip of the sectary on the hills of New-England, and it nerves the sinews of the Thug, while he draws the fatal noose around the neck of the unsuspecting traveller on the banks of the Ganges.

The result of this moral disease is two-fold. When it exists in isolated individuals, destitute of the intellectual power necessary to associate masses with themselves, alone and unsupported by sympathy, and at variance with every thing around them, it commonly ends in insanity. When, on the other hand, it happens to be combined with a vigorous understanding, commanding eloquence, and statesmanlike sagacity, it speaks into existence one of those moral whirlwinds, which, from time to time, sweep over the face of society. Instances of the former of these results may be found in almost every mad-house. As instances of the latter, the reader will immediately call to mind the establishment of the In-

quisition by Ignatius Loyola, the preaching of the crusades by Peter the Hermit, and the propagation of Islamism by Mahomet.

Wickedness, when propagated by a perverse conscience, is generically different from every other form of evil. Men are commonly wicked by reason of ungovernable passions. Avarice, revenge, lust, or ambition, will urge men to fearful crimes. But, since men are rarely subjected to the exclusive dominion of any one passion, these various impulses generally act as antagonist forces to each other. Avarice will restrain lust. Ambition will smother revenge. And thus, while the moral condition of a man may be no better than if he were left to the uncontrolled dominion of a particular vice, the *effect upon society* is rendered immeasurably less. Not so, however, when the moral principle is perverted. Conscience owns no equal. Its rank is, by concession, superior to that of the passions. Hence it knows of no counteracting, no counterbalancing force. It acts with the whole energy of the whole man, and the mischief which it works, is measured only by the limitation which God has fixed to his physical and intellectual power.

And hence, evil springing from this source can be arrested by none of the motives which may be addressed to men, when acting in obedience to

ordinary vicious impulses. If a man be the slave of passion, you may set before him the consequences which will result to himself, to his family, to his relatives, or to his country. Such considerations he must confess to be worthy of respect, and not unfrequently he will pause, reflect, put forth a vigorous effort of self-government, and reform. But, let a man be persuaded that he is acting in obedience to the dictates of conscience, and all such motives “pass by him as the idle wind which, he regards not.” He is obeying the voice of God, and he has nothing to do with consequences. Nay, you may show him that the very course which he is pursuing will defeat the end which he wishes to attain, and still it matters not. The responsibility rests with God, and not with him. Nay, more, if you point out to him the revealed command of God, directly at variance with the course which he is pursuing, he feels not the pressure of the obligation. The voice of God *within him* is more imperative than even the voice of God from Heaven. Thus is conscience made to usurp the place of God himself, and the creature assumes the right of giving laws to the Lawgiver of the Universe.

Such being the facts, and such being the tendencies of the moral disease which we propose to consider, it is manifest that it can be reached by



none of the ordinary modes of argument. Let it not however be considered, that the case is altogether desperate. There yet remains one view to be presented, which surely is worthy of the attention of any reasonable man.

It may be safely granted, that when conscience commands, its authority is unquestionable; that no consideration arising from the love of pleasure or the fear of pain; nay, that no consideration arising from consequences either to ourselves or to others, should come into competition with it. But it should be remembered that the question yet remains, has conscience really commanded? Until this question be answered, all argument built upon it is irrelevant. Granting that no earthly motive ought to interfere with the discharge of my duty, it certainly is not unreasonable to inquire what is, and what is not, my duty. Nay, further, as it is granted that we are bound to exert our whole power, without regard to consequences, in the performance of our duty; if we would avoid employing our whole power wrongfully, it behooves us, *first of all*, to investigate the question what is our duty, with all the care of which we are capable. And further, if there be any such thing as moral obligation, conscience, or duty, no question can be presented which we are under so imperative obligations to examine. as



this very one; for, until this be answered, we must act with our whole power, without knowing whether we are using or abusing the highest faculty with which our Creator has endowed us.

We shall come to the same result, if we attend for a moment to the object for which conscience was given us. It was given us in order that we might feel the sentiment of moral obligation. The brutes and ourselves are both the creatures of God; both are created by his power and sustained by his goodness. *We* have a conscience which renders us susceptible of the obligations resulting from the relations which the Deity sustains to us. They have no conscience and have no such susceptibility. Conscience teaches us that we are under obligations, greater than we can conceive, to love, serve and obey our Creator; and that nothing of which we can conceive, should be sufficient to interfere with the performance of every act which he has commanded. But while all this is strictly true, it is true of nothing which *he has not commanded*. We may plead his authority for the doing of any thing which he has enjoined, but we can plead it for nothing else. And the more sincere a man is in his desire to obey all the commands of God, and to act in every respect precisely as God would have him, the more careful will he be, to know

exactly and definitely what is the will of God, and to plead the authority of God for nothing whatsoever, for which he cannot clearly show that God has made himself responsible.

It seems to me that these are obvious principles, and that they commend themselves to every man's common sense. It is somewhat strange that they have not been more frequently discussed. To discuss them in a practical manner, will be the design of the following pages. My only object will be, to offer such suggestions as may enable a candid man to decide for himself, whether he in particular be under moral obligation to perform any particular act, or whether he is at liberty or under obligation to let it alone. If this can be done, many an honest mind will be relieved from frequent and distressing embarrassment.

It might perhaps be added, that the events of the present time seem specially to call for such a discussion. Almost every attempt made for the purpose of binding men together in masses, and thus of subjecting them to the dominion of leaders, is made under the solemn sanctions of moral obligation. Men plead the authority of God whilst they violate law, and whilst they sustain law against this very violation; whilst they infringe the rights of their neighbor, and whilst they de-

fend the rights of their neighbor against infringement; whilst the individual takes the power of society into his own hands, and whilst society punishes him for the transgression. It seems to be frequently taken for granted, that all duties belong to all men; that matters of right recognize no distinction either of age, or sex, of civil office, or ecclesiastical function; that all men, and all women, and all children, are equally responsible for all possible things; that there is no peculiar and special duty assigned to a magistrate or legislator, a people or a clergyman; but that every man, woman, and child, is responsible for the discharge of every possible duty, and that every human being may urge this responsibility upon every other human being, under penalty of the infinite displeasure of the eternal God.

Now, when opinions are held thus diametrically opposed to each other, error must exist somewhere. When two men, in stern collision on a moral question, and both equally honest, (for we impeach the motives of no one,) *both* believe themselves to be acting in strict obedience to the will of God, either one or both must inevitably be wrong; for the commands of God cannot be inconsistent with themselves. If we can ascertain what God requires of each one of us, we may be assured that these causes of collision will cease,

for we may be assured, that while each one acts within these limits, every one may act to the full amount of his power, and yet we shall all act in harmony. We therefore repeat, that whenever we plead, in any particular case, that moral obligation forbids us to listen to any other considerations, we are under a correspondent moral obligation, in the first place, to show that God has made *us* responsible for the doing of *that particular thing*; because this recklessness of consequences can be justified on no other ground than that of God's special command.

With this view, we shall consider the subject of Moral Responsibility. We shall first endeavor to illustrate some of the principles, by which we may decide whether we are, or are not, responsible for a particular result; and then endeavor to apply these principles to several of the cases in which a mistake is most liable to occur.

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## SECTION SECOND.

### THE PRINCIPLES BY WHICH WE MAY JUDGE OF OUR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

To a thoughtful man, deliberating upon a course of action, the question which naturally suggests itself is this: Am I held responsible for

the result which I wish to accomplish? In many cases, this question may be decided on the instant. Every man instinctively feels, that, in his transactions with his fellow men, he is responsible for entire faithfulness, justice, and veracity. He knows that he will be held guilty, if he act unjustly, or speak falsely. In other cases, although a particular good be desirable, he may justly doubt whether *he* be called upon to effect it ; and again, although *he* be called upon to effect it, he may properly inquire to which of the relations that he sustains, this responsibility attaches.—Thus, suppose a social evil to exist—for example, the sale of lottery tickets. If I have never had any thing to do with the system, if I have never sanctioned it, if I have communicated to my fellow men all the light which I possess on the subject, and if God have given me no power to administer a remedy for the evil, I am in no manner responsible for the mischief which it produces. Or, again; if God have placed in my hands a remedy, it may be a question to which of the relations that I sustain, it naturally appertains. It may belong to my character as an elector, that is, may attach to my right of suffrage. Or, if I have no vote, it may attach to my intellectual character; that is, may spring from whatever power I may possess either by

conversation or by writing, to influence the public mind. Or again, this power which I may possess over others, is restricted by the rights of others, and I may exercise it only in accordance with those rights. I think that every one must feel that his responsibility for any particular result, is limited by various restrictions of this kind, and that they all deserve to be considered, before he resolves that any particular act is his appropriate duty.

The notion of responsibility always involves the relation between a superior and an inferior. If I am responsible for any act to another, he has the *right* to command ; and it is my *duty* to obey. And yet more : it not only supposes that this relation exists, in general, but that in this particular instance, the will of the one party has been made known to the other. A coachman, who is employed by a merchant, is responsible for the discharge of a particular duty, and this responsibility admits the right of the one party to command, and the duty of the other to obey. But yet this responsibility is strictly limited to the particular duty prescribed. Because the coachman is responsible for the good condition of the merchant's horses and carriage, it by no means follows that he is responsible for the receipt and disbursement of his funds, or the government of his family.

Should he attempt to generalize his duties, and hold, that, because he was responsible for one thing, he was of course responsible for every thing; should he undertake to act as clerk, and instructor, and overseer to the whole establishment, we might think, in charity, that he was very benevolent, but we should be strongly tempted to think that he was also very impertinent. And though we might not be able to convince *him*, yet we should very easily convince *ourselves*, that if merchant and clerks, and porter and cook, and parents and children, all interpreted their responsibilities on such principles, so expanded a philanthropy would in no manner subserve the purposes either of utility or of benevolence.

In all moral questions, the being to whom we are ultimately responsible is the Creator. We owe to him our whole service, whether of body, or soul, or spirit. In saying this, however, I do not mean to deny that we are under moral obligations to our fellow men, both as individuals and as societies. But, inasmuch as these obligations are required by God as well as by man, they are also included in our duties to the Creator. That this is commonly admitted, is evident; since whenever a grave controversy arises respecting our duties to men, the one party or the other always appeals with confidence to the authority of



God. Such being the feeling of mankind, we may take it for granted, that the being to whom we refer, when we consider ourselves responsible for the performance of any duty, is the Creator. And again, when we say that we are responsible for any particular action, I suppose we mean that God will hold us guilty if we do not perform it; that is, that we are bound to perform it under the penalty of his displeasure, and of the consequences of that displeasure, be they what they may.

Now, if God stand to us in the relation of a "governor over servants," as it is expressed by Bishop Butler, it follows that the right of directing our service vests exclusively in him. He has the right of appointing the duties which he requires us to discharge as men in general; and also to prescribe what portion of these duties shall devolve upon each one of us as individuals in particular. This is, to say the very least, *as* evident as that the head of a family has the right to the service of all the persons in his employment, and also the right to assign to each one that portion of service which seems best in his own sight. To assert the contrary would be evidently absurd. It would be to assume that because we were servants, we had a right to serve in any manner, or to do any thing that we pleased; that is to say, that because



we were servants, we were at liberty to obey not another's will, but our own; that is, because we were servants, we were not servants at all.

From this, it of necessity follows, that our responsibility to the Creator, is a responsibility to obey his commands, to do the very thing that he has told us, and to do nothing either more, or less, or different from, what he has told us. To assume any other principle would be to usurp the prerogative of the Creator, and to assume that instead of being subjects, we were ourselves the governors of his universe.

In so far as our relations to God are *essentially* concerned, his commands have respect simply to *tempers of mind*. In these, our intercourse is held directly with the Father of our spirits, and inasmuch as they interfere with no other being, with them, no other being has any right to interfere. From the nature of their existence, they are uncontrollable by external force. They are strictly and exclusively within our own power. For these reasons, they rightfully may be, and they actually are, demanded of us, without reserve, in full measure, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul, and mind and strength," is the first and chiefest commandment.

The embodying of these tempers in action, is a different thing. The temper is the *essence*, the act is an *accident*. True, the temper cannot exist without correspondent action, *if the act be in our power*, taking the word *power* in its full import. But the act is not always in our power, and then it is not necessary to the fulfilment of the obligation. God has imposed upon me the duty of charity. But I may be myself perishing with hunger. I may possess neither alms to bestow, nor physical ability to render service. In this case, if God behold in my heart, the full measure of love to man, I obey his command as perfectly as though I performed the moral achievements of a Howard. It was "well that it was in David's heart" to build for God a house. He desired to honor God, and this *desire* was well pleasing to his Maker. But God did, however, not suffer him to build it, for reasons which seemed good unto himself. He had reserved that privilege for another. And, the will of God having been once signified, David's devout and humble acquiescence in it, is one of the most delightful features of his piety. Who does not see, that if the King had attempted to correct the revealed will of God by his own reason, he would have been guilty of manifest sin. Had he concluded, that because the worshippers of God needed a

temple, therefore the building of a temple was a desirable good ; and therefore that any one who was able, was bound to accomplish it ; that he possessed the physical ability, and therefore the duty devolved upon him, notwithstanding the intimation of the prophet ; every one sees that he would have acted in direct violation of the commands of God. Thus, while we are bound to exercise the proper temper of mind, we are bound also to manifest it, precisely *in the way* which God has appointed, or even not to manifest it in outward acts at all, if he shall so direct. Thus, we see that whilst our responsibility for the *temper of mind* is *unlimited* and *universal*, our responsibility for the *outward act* is *limited* and *special* ; and it is to be determined by *some other* manifestation of the Divine will, *aside from* that which requires the temper of mind itself. When we urge another to any particular act, as comprehended under the command which enjoins a particular temper of mind, we are therefore bound to show something besides that original and universal injunction. At least, we are bound to allow, that to the application of the command to this or that case, there *may be* distinct and authoritative exceptions ; and unless we can show that these exceptions do not rule in this particular case, we fail to make out the fact of particular

obligation. Thus, it is the minister's duty to preach the gospel. This may be urged upon him as a matter of general and permanent obligation. But if the services of a minister were required to render assistance to his dying family, we certainly could not hold him guilty for not preaching, until we had shown that the situation of his family did not in this case exempt him from obligation to the general command.

We say then, that, while the command of God is limited and unrestricted, so far as it respects obligation to a particular temper of mind, when we come to decide upon any particular action, which that temper of mind involves, and which, under ordinary circumstances, is its appropriate fruit, the circumstances under which the Providence of God has placed the individual actor, are as much to be taken into consideration as the original command itself. The circumstances under which we are placed, the relation which we sustain, the other obligations by which we are bound, were all ordained by God just as much as the general injunction. They form the language in which he, in this particular instance, reveals to us his will. And, the command, uttered in this manner, is as much to be heeded, and we are as much responsible to hear and to obey it, as we are to hear and to obey the other. It is only

by the clear consideration of both of these that we can learn what God requires of each one of us, that is, what that is, for which we are individually responsible. And, if it be so, it is evident that we have no right to plead the authority of God for our actions, nor to urge particular actions upon others, on his authority, until we have shewn, not only that the *general* temper of mind is required of us, but that there is no other manifestation of the will of God, limiting and restraining this particular manner of putting this temper into action.

I do not know that there is any necessity for urging, at length, so plain a principle, since every man, whether he admit it or not, habitually pleads it in defence of his own conduct. The wildest fanatic, he who beholds in the whole revelation of God but one single command, and who believes himself and every one else under stern and inflexible obligation to obey it at whatever sacrifice, admits it in its widest extent. He can neither urge his claim upon others, nor justify his own conduct to himself, without admitting that obedience to one command of God may be limited and directed by another command of God; and that, what may be the duty of one man under one class of circumstances, may not be the duty of another man under another class of circumstances.

So far as the principle is concerned, we agree with him. The only point at issue between us is this, shall this limitation and direction be ascertained by *the will of God*, as revealed in his providence and by his word, or shall it be left to the *capricious impulses* of every individual ; that is, shall we take God himself as the interpreter of his own will, or shall every one of us be subject to the interpretation of every other one who claims authority over conscience. The former is the doctrine of Protestantism, the latter of Romanism. The difference between the Romanism of St. Peter's and the Romanism of fanaticism is, that the former is the despotism of *one*, the latter the despotism of the *many*. In principle they are the same, one and indivisible.

We shall now proceed to illustrate these remarks by several cases in which the decision of providence and revelation indicates a limitation to our responsibility, and thus determines, in particular cases, the course of our duty.

I. In many instances, where a duty is commanded, we have not the *physical power* to perform it. Here the providence of God signifies to us that we are not *required* to perform it. Our responsibility ceases, and for the omission of it we are not held guilty.

This results, of necessity, from the limited nature of our intellectual and physical powers. We cannot be in two places at the same time. We cannot exert our muscular strength beyond a certain limit. Our command over the means of subsistence is accidental. When the richest has given away all, he can give no more, and yet there will remain needy to be relieved, ignorant to be instructed, and heathen to be converted.— Yet, when we have exhausted our resources, the commands, “Give unto him that asketh of thee,” and “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” stand written in as living characters as before. But, when we have done all in our power, though not another sinner were converted, or another want relieved, we are guiltless; we are only then responsible for the disposition.

And here it may not be amiss, in passing, to suggest a remark respecting the nature of human power, which in this connexion has not perhaps received sufficient attention. Power in creatures is an immeasurably different thing from power in the Creator. The latter is essential and absolute. God “speaks and it is.” We possess no such attribute. We have only the ability to use certain means, which, by some agency of which we know nothing, are commonly followed by a



given result. It is very rare that we can so foresee and arrange all the circumstances, that the result will be *inevitable*. In many cases, when we have absolutely done all in our power, the result is to us contingent; that is, it depends upon unseen agencies, which may or may not be exerted, and over which we have no control.

Hence we see that man is, in general, responsible not for the *result*, but for the use of those means which are the best known antecedents of that result. If he have used the best means with which he is acquainted, and the result do not occur, he is guiltless. If a physician administer medicine, he knows not that it will certainly cure his patient, yet he is guilty unless he administer such medicines as he believes to be most likely to cure him. In many cases the result is yet more contingent. We preach the gospel to men, but to make that gospel effectual to their conversion, is wholly beyond our power. And the greater the amount of this contingency, that is, the less certain is the connexion between the means which we use and the result which we desire, the more definitely are we responsible only for the use of the means. Thus we are never commanded to *convert* our fellow men. We are only commanded to *preach the gospel* to them. And, in such cases, we are clearly bound,



specially to abide by the strict letter of the command, and to do neither more, nor less, nor different from what we have been bidden.

If I mistake not, there has sometimes arisen theological error, from a mistake on this point. Men seem to have supposed that they were responsible for men's *conversion*, and not for *employing those means* which God has appointed for their conversion. Hence, supposing that they would be held guilty *if men were not converted*, they have considered themselves at liberty to use any means which seemed *to them* most likely to produce the result ; and to enjoin as general and as obligatory upon *all*, means, which they supposed to have been beneficial in *particular instances*. Hence has arisen the strife in the church at various times, respecting new measures and old measures. And these measures have too often been attacked or defended on the ground that they were or were not *appropriate*, or that they have or have not been attended by *success*. Now it seems to me that on neither of these grounds can any course of measures be properly either attacked or defended. If we are not responsible for the *conversion* of men, but only for the *employment* of those *means for converting them* which God has appointed, the simple question for us to decide, is, what are the means which he has

appointed? It may be safely taken for granted that the truths which he has put into our hands, and the motives which he has directed us to employ, are the truths and the motives which in their nature are best adapted to accomplish his purposes. At any rate, it would require no greater attainment in humility than falls to the lot of ordinary men, to teach us, that whether any better did or did not exist; it is at least doubtful, since God has not revealed them, whether we should be likely to discover them.

I think that we may therefore conclude, that how great soever may be a good which we are desirous of accomplishing, we are not responsible for the accomplishment of it, if it be *out of our power*; and this is equally true whether we use the phrase *out of our power*, to designate the fact that it is *beyond the limit* of an ability which we possess; or requiring a *kind* of ability, which has not been committed to us.

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### SECTION THIRD.

#### THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

Let us, however, suppose that the accomplishment of any specified good, be within the limit of our physical power, it does not, by necessity,

follow, that we are responsible for the performance of it. Our responsibility may be restricted, by the conflicting claims of other and more imperative duties, and it is by the adjustment of these claims, that we are taught, what, in any particular case, is the will of God concerning us.

I proceed and remark then, in the next place, that

1. Our responsibility is limited by the respect which we owe to the rights of our fellow men.

God has created us under obligations both to himself and to our fellow men. The one obligation is as truly binding upon us as the other. Both are sustained by the same authority. He who said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, said also, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. He never intends that these duties shall conflict with each other. Whenever we are in such circumstances that we cannot discharge a duty to him, without either violating the rights of our fellow men, or omitting a duty which we owe to them, he commands us to leave the duty to him undischarged. We must in such a case fulfil our obligations to men in *the act*, and our duty to him in *the spirit*. He assures us that he hates "*Robbery for burnt Offering*." "If thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against

thee, leave there thy gift before the altar ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Sometimes we cannot accomplish a specified good, without violating the rights of the party whom we intend to benefit. Thus, it is my duty to labor to promote the cause of temperance. I may have the physical power to keep my neighbor sober, by locking him up in my house, or by barricading him in his own. But I have manifestly no right thus to infringe his personal liberty ; and, if I have no other means than these of reclaiming him, he must go unreclaimed. I am guiltless.

At other times we cannot confer a benefit upon one man, without violating the rights of another. Thus, I may have no money with which to relieve a family in distress ; but I may possess the physical power to knock down a traveller, and thus procure whatever may be required for the purposes of charity. But it is manifest that I have no right to be charitable on such conditions. If I can relieve suffering on no other terms, it must go unrelieved. I am not responsible. To allow the end, in this manner, to justify the means, would be, as every one perceives, one of the most shocking perversions of moral obligation.

These, it may be said, are glaring cases. I acknowledge them to be so. They seem glaring, however, because the rights which we suppose to be infringed are *tangible* and *visible*; and are infringed by the exertion of physical force. But, it is to be specially remarked, that the limitation of our responsibility, in these cases, does not depend upon the fact, that we infringe, by physical power, *visible* and *tangible* rights, but simply and absolutely upon the fact, that we *infringe rights*. A right to what is *immaterial*, is as truly a right, as to what is *material*. To violate my right to reputation, is as great injustice, as to violate my right to property. To "cast out a man's name as evil" may be as truly persecution, as to "beat one in the synagogue." And, it is to be observed, also, that this principle may be carried justly to very extreme limits. It is thus carried by our Savior himself. What can be a more imperative duty than the worship of God? Yet our Lord teaches us, that even this is to be postponed, in order to effect a reconciliation with a brother whom we have wronged. We thus learn, that it matters not how grave or how important may be the duty which we owe to God, not only does he not require it of us, but yet more, he will not accept it at our hands, if it costs the violation of the rights of the meanest

thing that lives. If then, any thing whatever, which under other circumstances would be a duty, cannot be done without violating the rights, how small or insignificant soever, of a fellow creature, that thing ceases to be a duty. It may be the duty of others, but not of us ; or if of us, yet not at this time or in this manner ; and though the thing remain undone, we are guiltless. We are not held responsible for the result.

2. Our responsibility is frequently limited by innocent obligations which we have previously contracted.

The very constitution under which God has formed us, renders it necessary that we bind ourselves by moral obligations in regard to our future conduct. Of this fact, the very existence of society itself, is an illustration. We here, as individuals, bind ourselves to do, or to abstain from, certain actions ; and society, on its part, is bound to perform certain duties to us. The same principle is illustrated every hour of the day, in the life of every man. He who will pause and reflect will immediately perceive that he is under obligations for every day and for almost every hour of his life. He has either verbally or constructively, promised to do certain things for particular persons, to be in particular places, to pursue a certain course of conduct, as a husband,

a father, a brother, a man of business, a citizen, a friend, or a civil officer, and he thus stands, at the present moment, pledged in forms more numerous than he can readily enumerate.

Now, these, being all innocent and moral obligations, they are, of course, strictly binding. The laws of God which enjoins it upon us "not to lie one unto another," enjoins that these obligations be fulfilled to the spirit and to the letter. Wherever, therefore, the fulfilment of a promise which we have innocently made, comes into collision with a general command, the specific obligation takes precedence, and the obligation to obey the other command ceases. Thus I am under a *general* obligation to show kindness to my brother. If he can be materially assisted in his business by a loan of money with which I can accommodate him, I am bound to do it, and I incur moral guilt if I am unmoved by his necessity. But if, in ignorance of his situation, I have entered into a positive obligation to loan this money to my neighbor, much as I may regret it, I am bound by the previous obligation. I have no right to falsify my word to benefit my brother or any one else. Though I desire ever so much to do the particular good, the circumstances in which I am placed have deprived me of the moral power of doing it.



The reason of this is evident. The obligations to veracity are of necessity universal and ultimate. Unless they are fulfilled, society could not exist. But they would be universally abrogated, if every man were allowed to violate them and be guiltless, whenever any general duty seemed to interfere with them. No person could conscientiously promise any thing, nor could any man rely, for a moment, upon what a conscientious man promised. The word of an atheist would be better than the word of an apostle.

It therefore seems to me evident that an innocent obligation, once contracted, is binding, until it be either discharged or annulled by mutual consent. Such being the case, we are to judge of our duty at any one time, by the obligations under which we find ourselves at that particular time. We may wish that they were otherwise. We may have occasion to regret the shortsightedness of our nature, which did not enable us to foresee, in what manner our engagements at one time might interfere with our desires at another, but all this does not alter our obligations. We are to consider that, though we are shortsighted, there is a Being who is omniscient ; and that he frequently uses our very shortsightedness for the purpose of accomplishing his wise and benevolent designs. He allowed us to form these very



obligations, and to place ourselves in the very position in which we find ourselves, for the sake of indicating to us both our duty, and his will concerning us, at this particular time. It is in this manner that he indicates to one what he is to do, and to another what he is to leave undone. Thus, in any particular instance, granting that any specified good is to be accomplished by man in general, I may learn whether I am, or am not permitted, to have an agency in accomplishing it.

3. We are not responsible for the performance of an action, when it cannot be performed without using our power for other purposes than those for which it was committed to us.

All men are created essentially free and equal ; free and equal, not in respect to condition, but in respect of right. Every one has an equal right over the happiness which God has placed in his power. All are equally the children of one common Parent, who with equal affection loves them all as his children. All are equally brethren, standing in substantially the same relation to each other, and to that great Being who is to every one the same Father who is in Heaven.

But whilst this is the fact, it is also the fact that our common parent intended us to live together, not as isolated individuals, but as societies. And hence, whatever is essential to the existence

of society, is as much his will as any other ordinance which he has established.

In order to the existence of society, it is necessary that distinctions in respect to power should exist. Some men must, temporarily, and for the accomplishment of particular purposes, be clothed with the right to do what other men have not the right to do. Such is the case with the officers of civil government. How could civil government exist, unless there were legislators, judges, jurymen, executive officers, sheriffs, constables and justices? But the very conception of such offices, involves the idea, that the persons holding them have the power to do what other men have not the power to do. A judge may compel a criminal to appear before him, may sentence him to death, and a sheriff may put that sentence into execution, and these acts may be not only innocent but commendable. But, if any private individuals should do the very same thing, the act would be murder, punishable with death.

This is obvious, in so far as civil society is concerned. But the same principle applies with precisely the same effect, wherever men are united in any form of social organization. Every society must have its officers. But every office imposes a particular duty and confers a correspondent power. Thus, a church, in its simplest form, has

its presbyters and deacons. These offices impose peculiar duties, and these duties cannot be performed, unless those who are to perform them are clothed with certain powers which do not belong to the individual members of the society. The case is the same, when any other voluntary association chooses its President, Secretary, Board of Directors, or any other officers. In every such instance, there is a power temporarily conferred, which does not belong to the members of the society who hold no official character.

But it is essential to be remembered, that this power is always conferred for a *particular* and *specified* purpose. Beyond the limits of that particular and specified purpose, the officer has no more power than any other man. If he use that power for any other purpose, besides that for which it was conferred, he tramples upon the rights of his fellow men, and is precisely in the case of him who usurps a power, unsupported and unsustained by any office whatever. Thus a judge is clothed with power for the purpose of administering justice, in those cases which have been committed to him. He may use that power whenever it is necessary to accomplish this particular object; namely, the administration of justice. He has power, for instance, to imprison at will a lawyer, or a spectator; and, when this act is ne-

cessary to the discharge of his official duty, he does it innocently, nay, commendably. But to do it at will for any other purpose, even though the lawyer or the spectator deserved to be imprisoned, would be tyranny ; and for the doing of it he would deserve to be removed. The case is the same with a clergyman, a deacon, the officer of a benevolent association, or any other person under similar circumstances. A power is given them to perform certain acts, but this power is given for a specified purpose ; if they perform these acts for any other purpose than that for which the power was conferred, they as truly act without authority, they as plainly violate the rights of their fellow men, as though they performed the same acts, when no power, under any circumstances, had been conferred.

But suppose that some act of charity, or some deed of philanthropy, can be accomplished only by using official power, for purposes different from those for which it was conferred. Suppose the power which I hold as a judge, might be used for the purpose of promoting what I believe to be *religious truth*, and correcting what I believe to be *religious error*. May I not use it rightfully to promote purposes so holy ? The answer is obvious. If I have no right to use it except for one purpose, I have no right to use it

for *any other* purpose, whether holy or unholy. I have no more right to steal for purposes of charity, than I have for purposes of avarice. I have no more right to be false to my official trust for the purpose of saving men's souls, than for the purpose of ruining them. The man who would ask me thus to violate my official trust, for the sake of accomplishing any purpose for which that trust was not committed, must be either a simpleton or a knave. And if I listened for a moment to his suggestions, I must be either a simpleton or a knave myself.

Let then an object be ever so desirable, if I cannot accomplish it without using a power which I possess, for purposes different from those for which it was conferred, I am, by the circumstances in which God has placed me, precluded from accomplishing it. So far as I am concerned, it must be left undone. It may be the duty of other men, but it is not my duty; and whether it be done or left forever undone, I am not responsible.

4. Our responsibility ceases, when a particular good cannot be accomplished without the presentation of wrong motives to another.

The Creator has given us the power of influencing each other by the presentation of motives. We are able to excite each other's pity,

benevolence, love of justice, or patriotism ; and also each other's envy, pride, malice, avarice or revenge. A man under the excitement of either of these affections, will act as he would not act when unexcited. A man may sometimes be induced to perform an act, in itself good, from one of these classes of motives as well as from the other. Thus, the relief of a poor widow is in itself a good action, but the unjust judge instead of performing it from love of justice, performed it from love of ease. And thus, a man may frequently be induced to contribute his money in charity from motives of ostentation, or of pride, for the sake of shaming a rival or of building up a party ; nay, avarice itself may sometimes move him to part with a *little*, to-day, for the sake of enabling himself to grasp a great deal more to-morrow.

The question to be considered here, is this : Have I a right for any purpose whatever to present to another man a wrong motive, or, in other words, have I a right to tempt him to do that which violates the law of God and injures his own soul. For, it is always to be remembered that the presentation of wrong motives is neither more or less than a temptation to sin. The sin consists in indulging in a wrong temper of mind. Satan tempts us by presenting objects which ex-

cite in us these affections ; ambiguous men tempt us by exciting these affections in order to accomplish an ulterior purpose. In both cases, if the temptation succeed, the wrong affections are excited, and the sin is perpetrated. Which mode of accomplishing the result is the *more* nefarious, I leave to the parties interested in the issue, to settle between themselves.

If, then, the thing itself be wrong, can its character be changed by the object which we propose to accomplish by it ? Does God so stand in need of our agency in the accomplishment of his purposes, that he is obliged to purchase it, at the price of the violation of his own laws, and the ruin of the souls of his own creatures ? Nay, if it be innocent for us to excite men to sin, can there be any wrong in sinning ? And still more, if God have not commissioned us thus to ruin the souls of our fellow men, how passing expression must be the arrogance of that man who shall assume that he has a religious right to do it ! Although, then, an object to be accomplished be ever so desirable, yet if it cannot be accomplished without presenting evil motives before our fellow men, that object must be left undone. Should it never be accomplished, we are not responsible.

Here, however, I desire it to be remembered, that the above remarks refer merely to the pre-



sending of *wrong* or *vicious* motives. The thing asserted is, that we are never allowed, for any cause, to present such motives to our fellow men. Motives may be either holy, innocent, or unholy. My remarks apply merely to those of the third kind. God has provided various motives, by which men may be influenced, none of which are wrong, and which may vary from the character of simple innocence to that of the most exalted piety. We are allowed to use any one of these for the purpose of influencing our fellow men to do what is innocent, only we are always under obligation to employ the very best of which they are susceptible. Thus, if I knew a man was likely to steal, I might innocently attempt to dissuade him by presenting before him the command of God, and the love of Christ. If these motives failed, I might urge his own love of reputation, his love to his family, his relatives, and his friends. And again, if these failed, I might present before him the certainty of detection, and move him by his simple dread of physical evil. All this would be innocent; but I should have no right to dissuade him, by the consideration that if he did not steal at this particular time, it would be the means of enabling him with inevitable certainty, and without fear of detection, to murder his enemy to-morrow.



5. I add in the last place, that our responsibility for the performance of one duty, may be limited by the more urgent claims of another duty of the same character.

This may be easily illustrated by the case of benevolence. We are commanded to promote the physical, intellectual and moral happiness of our fellow men. We are also commanded to do this for all men, and to do it at all times. But we are neither omnipotent nor omnipresent.—Though the temper of heart from which acts of charity proceed, should be wide as the universe, and boundless as human misery, yet, the acts, to which this temper of heart tends, must of course be restricted within the limits of that physical power which God has placed in our hands.

This actual charity is all to be performed. But as no one can either do it all, or even do ever so fractional a part of *every* department of it, it follows, that it is to be performed on the principle of division of labor: that is, that each one is to select his own portion of the duty, and devote his energies to the accomplishment of it. In this manner, each one doing the part allotted to him, it will all be done. If every one attempted to do a part of all, nothing would be effected.

When the claims of simple benevolence conflict with each other, the principles which may

properly guide us to a decision, are various. The attempt to enumerate them all, is not necessary to my purpose. It is only necessary for me to show that they *exist*, and that their existence limits our responsibility. I merely mention a few, by way of example. Some of them I presume to be the following: *The greater the exigency the greater the claim.* If we were called upon at the same moment to aid two men, of whom the one had only swooned, while the other was bleeding to death, no one could doubt, that our first services were due to the latter. Again, the exigencies being equal, the *amount of good to be effected by my exertion*, would naturally determine me. If I am called upon to assist ten drowning men, and by one course I can save nine, but in pursuing it I must leave the other to his fate, I am bound to save the greater number. Again, the exigencies being equal, I suppose that my duty would be designated by the *relations in which I may stand* to the parties. Were several persons in equal danger, I should be under greater obligations to assist my father or my brother than a stranger. On the same principle, those who are near us have stronger claims than those who are afar off.

Whenever conflicting claims like these arise, and but one of them can be satisfied, we must use

our reason to decide the question of preference. When this is decided, our duty is determined. This designates what is the will of God respecting this particular action, and discharges us from the claims of any obligation inconsistent with it. Much as it may be desirable that some other good be done, we are not answerable for the doing of it. Whatever ill may happen in consequence of our choice, we are not responsible.

In the preceding remarks I do not pretend to have enumerated all the cases in which our responsibility for the performance of general duties is limited. Sufficient, however, has, I hope, been shown, to accomplish the purpose which I have in view, which is, simply to exhibit the doctrine that such limitations exist, and that wherever they exist, they are a real and valid discharge from the performance of the duty from which they exclude us; and to show, from a variety of cases, that such limitations are matters of constant occurrence; so constant, indeed, that no one can neglect them without falling into serious error, and becoming liable to incur positive guiltiness.

But, to all this, it may be objected, that if this be so, if we are obliged to examine all these limitations, we shall be responsible for very

little, and thus, that the obligations to benevolence will be seriously diminished.

To this I beg leave to answer briefly, as follows :

First : The real question to be considered here, is, what is the truth ? If what I have said be true, it will be true, notwithstanding any objections that may be urged against it. Or to state the same idea in other words, the question is, what is the will of God on this subject ? If God have assigned us a particular work to do, we may be assured that the accomplishment of that very work will best subserve the purposes of his government ; that it is best suited to the nature of our faculties, and the circumstances of our situation ; and we are by no means competent to say that by doing either more or less, or something different, we shall either do more good, or more successfully promote the cause of truth and righteousness. It becomes us always to bear in mind, that we are "of yesterday and know nothing." We are passionate, God is long minded. We are ephemeral, God is eternal. We are ignorant, God is omniscient. God has reasons for delaying the accomplishment of his purposes, of which we cannot possibly conceive. It becomes us, therefore, to bow with deference to his decisions, and to acknowledge his authority as

much when at one time he holds us back from doing good, as when at another he commands us to do it.

Secondly. The subject here discussed has nothing whatever to do with the question of the *amount* of our responsibility. This is to be decided by the extent of our faculties. We are bound to use them all, at all times, and with all their power, precisely as God shall appoint. We have to do here with entirely another subject, the *objects* towards which the exertion of our faculties shall be directed. It is one thing to say that an officer of government is responsible for nothing, and another to say that he is responsible for every thing. We pretend not to limit the zeal, the self-denial, the intensity of purpose, with which any one shall serve God; but we do say, that it will be far better that this zeal, self-denial and intensity of purpose should be directed by the steadfast *wisdom* of God, than by the fluctuating *caprice* of man.

Thirdly. If it should still be said, that these principles would confine everyman down to a very few forms of benevolence, since there are but very few in which he can act, without interfering with some one or other of the duties to which I have alluded, I ask, what then? If God have so ordained, why should we not be

satisfied? On *earth* we all court more responsibility; I fear that at the day of account, we shall all ascertain that we have been entrusted with responsibility enough. It seems to me that every one of us may find abundant occupation, if, with suitable sentiments respecting his obligations to God, he set himself diligently at work to cultivate precisely the field of labor which God has set immediately before him. And yet more. I am rather of the opinion that the carrying out of these principles into action, would practically rather widen than narrow the range of duties for which a man would discover himself to be responsible. So far as I have seen, whenever a man begins by neglecting the limits of responsibility which God has affixed, and assuming that every one is responsible for *every thing*, he ends, by holding himself and every one else responsible for only *one thing*. All questions of duty seem to him resolvable into one. All the commands of God are concentrated into one precept. Thus, the theory which assumes to enlarge without limits the field of our responsibility, contracts it in fact within the narrowest limits possible. The moral result which must of necessity follow from the neglect of so large a portion of the will of God, may be easily conceived.

If it be said that men may abuse these principles to shelter themselves from the responsibility which properly belongs to them, the answer is easy. We have only to ask, are these principles according to the will of God? If so, we are not responsible for the result. He knew when he promulgated his will, that it would be liable to abuse from the perversity of man. The responsibility for this, rests, neither with him nor with us, but with the man who abuses it. And, besides, if the perfect will of God be liable to this abuse, can it be supposed that we shall be able to originate a better rule of duty, or one which shall be less liable to abuse. Thus was it in the times of our Savior. The Jews found reason for disbelieving the revelation of God, whether it were announced with the stern austerity of John the Baptist, or commended by the winning condescension of the friend of publicans and sinners. For this bias to evil there was no remedy. For its results neither Christ nor his forerunner was responsible. All that our Lord himself chose to say concerning it was, "wisdom is justified of her children."

In conclusion, it will be seen that the points insisted on in the preceding pages, are nearly all comprehended within the limits of the question, whether or not the end justify the means; in



other words, whether it be ever innocent to perpetrate a wrong, for the sake of accomplishing a specified good. The Jesuits are said to have maintained the affirmative on this question.— Protestants have very generally asserted the negative. It would be easy to follow out the consequences which of necessity flow from these opposite opinions, but this can scarcely be necessary. Every reflective man can readily do this, at his leisure, for himself. He who will do this, and will also allow the decision at which he must arrive, to hold a firm and practical grasp upon his opinions, will, I think, readily perceive himself to be restricted by such limitations as I have suggested. I know of no method by which a man will derive greater assistance in deciding for himself the constantly recurring question, what is my duty ; or, by which, he will be more readily extricated from otherwise most perplexing moral embarrassment.

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## SECTION FOURTH.

### OF PERSECUTION ON ACCOUNT OF RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

The author of "Fanaticism," a work of great learning and uncommon ability, has defined the evil which he, in so masterly a manner, portrays,

to be "*enthusiasm inflamed by hatred.*" He has, with peculiar felicity, analyzed the malign emotions of the human heart, and with graphic accuracy delineated the process of their development. I cannot, however, but suspect, that the vividness of his imagination has sometimes misled this author himself, and it can scarcely fail to mislead his readers. It is by no means uncommon, for a man of brilliant genius to form his conceptions so distinctly, and to contemplate them so steadily, that he at last turns his attention from the original in human nature, to the somewhat highly wrought picture of it in his own fancy. A picture, even when ever so accurate, can present a subject in only one point of view. It thus happens, that a writer who reasons from his own conceptions, is liable, from the glowing richness of his imagery, to present what is unquestionable truth only in one peculiar position, and clothed, under all circumstances, in the same unchanging drapery.

It seems to me that the author alluded to, has fallen into this error, in the present case. That fanaticism is frequently "*enthusiasm inflamed by hatred,*" I have no doubt. That such was its character, in most of the cases by which he has illustrated his principles, must also be admitted. That this combination of emotions, when it has

become the habit of the soul, would constitute a man a persecutor, every one must acknowledge. For the power with which the author of "Fanaticism" has held up this atrocious wickedness to the detestation of the human race, he richly deserves all, and more than all, of the commendation which he has so liberally received. But yet I can scarcely believe that persecution has never germinated except in so corrupt a soil. It has, if I mistake not, sometimes taken root by the side of many of the best attributes of our nature. It has been the error not only of gloomy monks and sour ascetics, but also of men of sincere piety and even of general philanthropy. Calvin, it is said, consented to the burning of Servetus. Our Puritan ancestors drove away the Baptists, and, as I fear we must allow, hung the Quakers. It seems to me, that in neither of these, nor in a multitude of similar instances, could we truly assert the motives to have been "enthusiasm inflamed by hatred."

If I mistake not, the origin of their error was a mistake as to the limits of human responsibility. When they had once taken it for granted, that they were responsible for the correctness of the religious belief of their fellow men, and that therefore they were at liberty to use all the physical power which God had placed in their

hands, to propagate truth, and to arrest the progress of error, persecution followed of course. It would then require no exercise of the malign emotions, to kindle the fire or to erect the gibbet. Persecution unto death would be the calm dictate of religious duty; nay, it might in such circumstances co-exist with genuine benevolence. Grant these principles, and we are astonished, not that persecution has been so relentless, but that among men of firm character it has been so forbearing. And thus, in fact, we not unfrequently meet with instances, in which the man's principles taught him to persecute, while the benevolence of his heart restrained him. He then slays the heretic, when he cannot suffer him to escape without abandoning his principles, but he is very willing that the heretic should keep out of his way. He will not seek after him, and he will not see him *officially*, unless it be impossible to avoid it. Such, it is said, was the case with the Emperor Trajan. He writes to Pliny, not to inquire for Christians, but decides that if any were brought before him and convicted, they must be put to death.

While, however, I would, in many cases, assign a motive for persecution, somewhat different from that assigned by the author of "Fetanicism," I by no means pretend to decide upon

the relative degree of guilt which attaches to these motives. This is the province of an unerring Judge. Perverse, or even thoughtless ignorance, *may be*, under some circumstances, as great a crime as hatred. Nor would I, at all, allay the feeling of moral indignation, which is due to this form of wickedness. The practical evil which springs from it, may be even greater when arising from this cause than from the other. Springing from this motive, it may insinuate itself into the bosom of a just and pious man. Hence an atrocious violation of right is sheltered from detestation by the general excellence of him who perpetrates it. It is also less easily corrected. Hatred, when not continually provoked, like all other violent emotions, subsides away into indifference ; but the principle of duty is enduring. Hatred may be softened by meekness ; malignity may be conquered by kindness. But when a man persecutes his neighbor unto death, from the love of man and from duty to God, what motive can either justice or benevolence present to arrest him in his career? To the sufferer himself, it must be an additional aggravation, to reflect that the sacrifice of his inalienable rights, is justified on the ground of eternal justice and illimitable love. There was intense bitterness of spirit in the exclamation of

Madame Roland, on her way to the scaffold: "O Liberty! Liberty! what crimes are perpetrated in thy name."

The manner in which a just, and even a benevolent man, may be deeply stained with the crime of persecution, may be easily stated. Let it be granted that he is responsible for the religious or political opinions of his fellow men, that is, that God will hold him guilty if his fellow men believe error; and that God has authorized him to use his whole physical power to promote the success of what is true, and to arrest the progress of what is false, and persecution becomes at once *an indispensable duty*. Society is bound by every tie of obligation to devote its whole power to this work. Confiscation, banishment, stripes, imprisonment, torture, death, become at once the legitimate and sanctified weapons of our warfare. They are the very instruments which God has put into our hands, and commanded us to use, for the holy purpose of saving the soul, and showing forth his glory. It is true, the natural sympathies of the heart may revolt at the misery which we are working, but the natural feelings of the heart are in such a cause to be crucified. The very act of overcoming them is here an acceptable sacrifice to God. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. Benevolence

itself erects the scaffold, and signs the death warrant. All our sorrows arise from moral evil. If moral evil be annihilated, the happiness of our race will be immeasurably increased. It matters not, then, what may be the *present* misery, if it tend to *future* and immeasurably *greater* good. We may therefore listen, with complacency, to the groan of the prisoner, or the shriek of the confessor ; and witness, without a shudder, the dying agonies of the martyr. Our Savior himself was grievously *in error* respecting the object of his mission, and his disciples were in *the right* when they wished to call down fire upon the city of the Samaritans. Ignatius Loyola was a far better disciple of Christ than the Apostle Paul. The Revolutionists of France have been shockingly belied, and Marat, Danton and Robespierre have been, in modern days, the sincerest friends of liberty.

But this is not all. If these principles be true, I see not why the holy work of persecution should be committed solely to society. I see not why individuals should not equally be allowed to labor in it. My neighbor is propagating error, dangerous error. Why should not this evil be arrested by arsenic, or by the stiletto? He possesses influence in consequence of his good name, and this influence gives currency to his



sentiments. By a well arranged lie, I can render him an outcast and a vagabond. Why should I not by a few words render him, for the rest of his life, harmless? He possesses property, by means of which he is enabled the more widely to disseminate his opinions. Fire, skilfully applied, will, in a few hours, consume his dwelling; and an auger, well used, will easily sink his ships. And thus, grant the principles to which I have alluded, and all the bonds of moral obligation are, I will not say *relaxed*, they are absolutely *annihilated*. A man has only to persuade himself that he is clothed with such powers, and created under such responsibilities, and the most atrocious crime becomes an act of imperative duty. Man becomes the direct foe to man. The sweetest sympathies of our nature are turned into gall and wormwood, and earth becomes at once a shrieking pandemonium. Nor is this mere fancy. The prisons of the Inquisition, and the records of the Holy Office, bear witness that all this hath in very deed been enacted in many a country of Europe.

But, blessed be God, it is not so. These principles are essentially, universally, and atrociously false. We are *not* responsible for the *opinions* of our fellow men. We are responsible only for the setting before their understanding and con-

science what we believe to be the truth. The responsibility then rests solely with themselves. Whatever be our physical power, we are forbidden to use it in such manner as to infringe the smallest right of our neighbor, for the purpose of accomplishing either this or any other good whatsoever. God has made known his will to men, and he has commanded them as *ambassadors*, not as *executioners*, to make it known to each other. If they obey his commands, well. If they obey not, he reserves to himself the right of trying the offender, of passing sentence upon him, and of executing judgment. This, and all of this, is, solely, *his* prerogative. The moment we assume it, we usurp his authority, and while we profess to *obey* him, are claiming for ourselves dominion over the universe.

The fact is, that the relations which subsist between man and man are *as truly* relations, as those which subsist between man and God. The obligations which bind man to man are as truly obligations, as those which bind man to God. By the constitution under which the Creator has placed us, the rights of man are as truly rights, as the rights of God. The violation of the rights of man is as truly a violation of right, as the violation of the rights of God. The Judge of the whole earth will do right. He will

vindicate the rights of the meanest thing that he has made, as certainly as he will vindicate his own. He never lays claim to any thing, which, even by semblance of justice, can be claimed by any other being. What can, therefore, be a greater insult to his holiness, than to offer to the *just one* a sacrifice, wrenched by oppression from the hands of his creatures, or to presume to please him, by violating the rights of those to whom he stands in the relation of Father, Protector and Judge? What can be a greater affront to his majesty, than for the creature to assume the prerogative of the Creator, and administer his laws, and undertake to punish those crimes, the cognizance of which he has clearly reserved for his own special jurisdiction?

If this be so, and that it is so, all, in Protestant countries, will readily admit, the whole reason for persecution, on account either of religious opinion or practice, provided that practice interfere not with civil right, falls to the ground. Hatred and malignity may still use obligation to God as a subterfuge, and may transform dislike to sentiment, into vindictiveness against him who holds it. But, if these truths be acknowledged, all *excuse* for oppression is taken away, and persecution, if it exist at all, must stand forth to the world, unveiled, in its native deformity.

The fact then seems to be, that our duties to God, whether they be tempers of mind or actions purely indicative of these tempers, are matters subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of God himself. If we obey him, he claims to himself alone the right to reward us. If we disobey him, he claims to himself alone the right to punish us. No other being in the universe has the right to intermeddle in the premises, either for the sake of reward or of punishment. The right of God is equally exclusive of individuals and of societies. If we persevere in disobedience to God, our fellow men may attempt to *change our minds*, but only in such way as God himself has appointed; that is, *by the "manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience."* If these means fail, the duty of our fellow men to us is accomplished. We must then be left to our own course. Our fellow men are not responsible for us any further. God, henceforth, reserves the case for his own exclusive jurisdiction.

All this, so far as civil government is concerned, is pretty generally, in theory at least, admitted. That it is as generally, however, admitted in practice, could not with equal truth be asserted. The distinction, in civil right, which even now exists, in most countries in Europe, between those who worship God in one way, and those

who worship him in another, shows that the truth on this subject has not yet wholly eradicated the persecuting usages of a darker age. Nor is our own country yet entirely free from the reproach of interference in matters of this kind, although the evil shows itself in a modified and disguised form, and pleads, in excuse, an entirely different reason. Thus, in some of our States, clergymen are denied the right of suffrage, and are not allowed to be candidates for any civil office. That it is *wise* for a clergyman to mingle, in any manner, in political strife, I by no means assert; nay, I most strenuously assert the contrary. This, however, is a very different question from that of his *right* to do so, if he choose. His calling is an innocent one, and, being innocent, it should work no disqualification, any more than that of any other man. Something of the same kind may also be seen, where the ordinary privileges, which, of right, are always granted to associations of men for *other purposes*, are denied to men associating for *religious* purposes. All such interference is a violation of the right of religious liberty, against which it becomes the citizen steadfastly and strenuously to protest. In the prosecution of every *innocent* object, a man may rightfully claim the protection of society; and with the matter of its being *religious*, neither so-

ciety, nor any individual of society, has any manner of concern.

But these are evils of small amount and of very limited extent. They are rapidly passing away before a clear knowledge of the principles of human right. There are, however, other evils, of a kindred character, more closely allied to the spirit of the age, and which, we fear, will not be so readily eradicated. I allude to the animosities which exist between the different sects of professing christians. These spring from the same source, as those forms of persecution to which I have alluded. The principle is in both cases the same. If I have a right to interfere with the happiness of my fellow men, on account of difference in religious opinions in one way, I have the same right to interfere in another way. If I have *no right at all*, then, interference with his happiness, for this cause, *in any way*, is a crime.

Suppose my christian brother to be in error. Suppose that he also propagates error. For this, he is accountable to God and not to me. I have a right to endeavor to convince him, if he be willing to hear me; and he enjoys the correspondent right. When this is done, my responsibility ceases, and here, our whole relation, *so far as this matter is concerned*, terminates. He has the same *right* to propagate his *error*, that I have

to propagate my *truth*. The only weapons which I am authorized to use, are, considerations addressed to his understanding and conscience. To use any other is persecution. A frank and manly attachment to our opinions, combined with a willingness to look upon our own sentiments and those of others, in the light of reason, is, every where, honorable. But to rely upon any thing else for the propagation of our sentiments, betrays either a consciousness of the weakness of our cause, or else a selfish disposition to invade the rights of our neighbor.

Let us bear in mind the principle which I have endeavored to illustrate, and see whether it will not tend greatly to allay these unchristian animosities. If I have no right to contend with erroneous religious opinion, except by an appeal to the reason and conscience of men ; if, having done this in fairness and in love, all my responsibility for the progress of that error ceases, then, surely, every other mode of effort to oppose it must be persecution. It is giving pain for the cause of religious opinions, when I have no right to give pain. If this be so, while it is allowable, nay, while it may be commendable, to support what we believe, by as strong *arguments* as we please, it is wrong to say or do any thing which would give the least unnecessary pain to the feelings of



an opponent. It is equally wrong to misstate the opinions of another, or to draw inferences from his opinions which he has not drawn, for the sake of fixing upon him the odium of the public. What excuse can be framed for him, who, not satisfied with establishing what he believes to be right, shall strive to bind together the sect to which he belongs, by cherishing jealousy against other christian sects, and teaching his own adherents to believe that every other sect in Christendom is leagued together for their destruction. All these petty modes of guerilla warfare, are, as it seems to me, vastly contemptible. When men differ in any matter of belief, let them meet each other manfully. Neither has any right to take offence at opinions plainly and honestly, nay, I will say strongly, expressed. Let each allow this privilege to the other; and then put the whole question to the issue of argument. No man ought to wince from this. No man has a right to complain because, while I allow him the same privilege, I frankly and decidedly express my opinions. He has no right to ask that, out of respect to his feelings, I shall not, on proper occasions, say, what I believe to be, important truth. He has no right to cherish such feelings, much less to make them the limit to my liberty of speech. Cherishing a candid though fervent

love to truth, we may thus differ without alteration, and disagree without bitterness. Entertaining these sentiments, we may espouse very different views on the less essential points of christian doctrine and practice, and yet we shall be one in spirit, in temper, in action.

The results to which a contrary temper must lead, are easily seen. Its tendency is to set every man's hand against his brother. It cultivates the sentiment, in every sect, that every other sect is its natural enemy, opposed to its progress, and hostile to its success. Thus, the christian host is broken up into distinct detachments, which, instead of drawing closer and closer to each other, are tending every moment to a wider and wider separation. Every avenue is thus opened for the indulgence of ambition on the part of sectarian leaders. Each one is clamorous in setting forth the dangers to which his sect is exposed; because, the greater the danger, the greater must be the glory of the champion. As, in the state, so it is in the church, military glory leads too frequently to the destruction of independence. The fancied danger elevates the commander to the dictatorship;—and thus churches, as well as states, are ruled by the voice of a demagogue.

Nor is this all. When men have been made

to believe that other men are preparing to oppress them, it is natural to prevent the evil, by seizing upon the means of oppression for themselves. Hence arises the strife which is sometimes exhibited among sects, for secular influence. Of this bias the politician is ready to avail himself, and hence it is not uncommon to behold a demagogue, coquetting with several sects, and tampering with their various leaders; and, if it shall so happen, that the same man is at once a political and a sectarian demagogue, his influence becomes incalculable.

But the subject is too painful to dwell upon. I gladly dismiss it? In the midst of all this strife, how can the spirit of God dwell. While we love our own sect better than our common master, how can we even expect his blessing? He will assuredly turn our counsels into foolishness. We grasp the shadow but we lose the substance. Let us eschew these base artifices of an intriguing world. The weapons of our warfare are *not* carnal. Let us rely simply upon truth and righteousness. It is a dishonor to deceive, but it is no dishonor to be deceived. Let the faults of our brethren teach *us* to do better, but let us never imitate them. And finally, if our opinions cannot be supported by truth and righteousness, by kindness and meekness, by forbearance and

the rendering of good for evil, let us abandon them ; for, if they cannot be sustained by such means, they surely can be sustained by no other.

I have already extended these remarks beyond the limits which I had assigned to this part of the subject, and therefore have but a paragraph to devote to another form of persecution. I allude to that on account of political opinions. The observations which I have just made, in reference to religious sects, apply with almost equal force to political parties. The object of the partisan leader is not to sustain his own opinions, (if perchance he have any,) by *argument*, but to render the opinions of the opposite party odious. Hence, each party claims to itself an exclusive love of country, and stigmatizes the other as the natural enemies of the State. Hence, in so extreme a case, it is not remarkable that extreme means are resorted to. Men feel at liberty to promote their own views, by means the most exceptionable. The hope of office, and the fear of displacement, are brought to bear upon every question. Universal political proscription is beginning to be looked for, as the natural result of an election. The most important social and constitutional principles are forgotten, and the august spectacle of a nation choosing its rulers, under

the guidance of moral principle, is exchanged for the contemptible exhibition of a universal scramble for the loaves and fishes of office. Surely all this is sufficiently deplorable. A man has a right to defend his political opinions and to propagate them by *argument*. I see not his right to propagate them by the fear of punishment or the hope of reward. Political power was never placed in his hands for such purposes. To use it thus is persecution. Nor is it the less odious for being so universally practised.

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## SECTION FIFTH.

### OF THE PROPAGATION OF TRUTH.

The importance of a knowledge of the laws of God, whether physical, intellectual or moral, is too obvious to need discussion. We can be happy only as we obey these laws. We can obey them only as we are acquainted with them. We can be acquainted with them, only as those who have discovered, reveal them to others. Hence, it has truly been said, that he who withholds from mankind any knowledge essential to their welfare, is, in no small degree, responsible for the evils which result from the ignorance which he might have prevented. He who conceals a

remedy which will cure an epidemic, is surely, in some sense guilty of murder; as he who extinguishes a light-house is answerable for the shipwrecks which follow. Who can estimate the consequences which must have arisen, had Newton concealed his discovery of the laws of light and gravitation, had Jenner concealed his discovery of the effects of vaccination, or, more than all, had the disciples of Christ kept hidden within their own bosoms, the knowledge which had been revealed to them, of the way of salvation.

It is not therefore to be wondered at, that men, looking at the inconceivable evils which would result from the suppression of truth, have always assigned to the propagation of it, a place among our most imperative duties. It is not without reason, therefore, that they enrolled first in the catalogue of heroes, the names of those who have sealed their testimony to truth with their blood. The epithet martyr, in its sober, legitimate sense, is the most honorable designation which the languages of men can confer. That this truth is coming to be so universally acknowledged, is one of the favorable indications of the present time.

Such being the natural and honorable feelings of the human heart, it is, surely, not surprising, that the moral splendor which in many cases in-

vests the promulgation of truth, should have somewhat disqualified men from attending accurately to the primary elements of which that splendor is composed. Hence, because it is sometimes glorious to publish truth, they have, not unfrequently, concluded that it is equally glorious to publish all that is true; that because it is honorable and decorous to die rather than be silent, when God commands us to speak, therefore, it is honorable and decorous to die for the sake of speaking, whether God have commanded us, or not. Now, that there is a distinction between these cases, I think no one can dispute. It may not therefore be inappropriate, to devote a few pages to this subject. I shall endeavor in these remarks, to suggest some considerations, respecting the moral limitations to our duty, in the propagation of truth.

And, in the first place, I would remark that the moral precept respecting veracity, is not a positive but merely a negative precept. It does not command us *to bear witness*, it merely forbids us to bear *false witness*. It does not direct us either when, or what we shall speak; but it forbids us whenever we do speak, to utter any thing except the simple verity. Hence, our duty, in respect to what we shall promulgate, saving only that we must not promulgate falsehood, is entirely un-



affected by this command. It will indeed be seen, upon the slightest reflection, that this is the only precept that could have been given on this subject.

The mere fact that any thing is true, is no reason whatever why we should promulgate it. Were it otherwise, every man would be under obligations to tell every one whom he saw, every thing that he knew. Every thing, whether bad or good, must be made a matter of universal publicity. The confidence of the most intimate friendships must be violated as a matter of religious duty. The domestic fireside would cease to be a sanctuary. The tortures of such a situation would be beyond endurance. Every man would flee to solitude as a refuge from society, which had thus become an intolerable nuisance.

It being evident, then, that the fact, that a thing is true, is no reason for promulgating it, we naturally inquire what additional element must be combined, in order to render the promulgation of it obligatory. We answer, if the fact that a thing is true impose no obligation, the obligation must be derived from the general will of God, either expressed in revelation, or inferred from a consideration of the general consequences, belonging to each particular case.

Thus, there are certain moral truths which

God has revealed to us, and which he has made it our duty to promulgate to others. He has commanded us to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." What he said to his disciples in the ear, he commanded them "to proclaim upon the house tops." Yet, even here, it is to be observed, that the obligation to publish seems to rest, not upon the fact that the matter itself *was true*, but that *he commanded them to publish it*. Thus, on a former occasion, he absolutely forbade them to reveal that He was the Messiah. On another occasion, he forbade them to reveal the truth of the approach of his reign to any except Jews, saying "into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." He forbade them to reveal the fact of his transfiguration until after his resurrection; and also forbade the person whom he had healed, to publish the fact to his fellow citizens.

These instances, I think, abundantly show, that the simple fact that any thing is true, imposes no obligation to promulgate it; that to promulgate it, even when, so far as we can see, it would be attended with no evil consequences, may be contrary to the will of God; and that the obligation to promulgate the Gospel itself, depends, not upon its truth, but upon the fact that our Lord has *commanded us to publish it*.

Again, there are general laws of nature, physical, social and moral, which originate with the Creator, and the knowledge and the observance of which, are essential to our well being. Just in so far as these are understood and obeyed, society advances in happiness and virtue. He who discovers any such law, is, I suppose, bound to make it known to his fellow men. God has put it in his power to confer a special and peculiar benefit upon others, and if he do not avail himself of this opportunity of increasing human happiness, I do not perceive how he can be held innocent. It may, however, be said that the discovery of a new law, or the invention of a new mechanical instrument, may be injurious to some, as well as beneficial to others; as, for instance, the discovery of a new and cheaper and more efficacious locomotive power might injure those at present engaged in making and in using steam machinery. To this the answer is easy. The law in question having been ordained by a good and wise Being, it will work happiness *upon the whole*, though *individuals* should accidentally suffer. I may regret this result, and would do all, consistently with my duty, to prevent or to alleviate it; but no one has a right to ask, that the temporary good of a *part* should be put in competition with the permanent good of

the *whole* ; nor, if he should ask this, have we any right to grant it.

So far, however, as the objection proceeds upon the principle, that the liability of any particular truth to work injury, is *a* reason why it should not be promulgated, it is unanswerable. We have before shown, that the fact that any-thing is true, is no reason why it should be promulgated. If, then, the truth furnishes no reason for promulgation, injurious tendency can assuredly furnish none, but the strongest reason to the contrary. A man has no more right to act for the purpose of injuring his neighbor, by speaking truth, than by speaking falsehood. I say, then, the fact that a truth is of injurious tendency is *a reason* why it should not be promulgated ; I do not, however, say that it is always *a sufficient* reason. It is a sufficient reason when nothing but injury can result. It is a sufficient reason, when it is not evident that a general good cannot be accomplished without the suffering of this particular evil. In such a case, other things being equal, we are bound to prefer the good of the whole to the good of a part.

What has been here said of benevolence, may be extended with equal truth to justice, or to any other kind of moral obligation. We thus arrive at the general doctrine, that we are authorized to

promulgate injurious truth, or truth which will give pain to any one, in no case because *it is truth*, but, simply, because we are under the necessity of doing it, in order to fulfil some specific moral obligation. The giving of pain in any case, requires justification; and our only justification is, that an imperative duty rendered our giving this pain unavoidable. To give pain, by the utterance of truth, without such reason, is to do gratuitous wickedness; and it is as wicked as to give gratuitous pain in any other case. And still more, if such be the ground of our justification, it will hold us innocent in giving pain, only in so far as it can be shown that the claims of duty could be satisfied in no other manner. To give pain in any degree, or to any extent, beyond this, is, by this extent or to this degree, to give gratuitous pain, and is unjustifiable and wicked.

So much, then, for the *matter* of that which we may be under an obligation to promulgate. We cannot, I think, be under obligation to promulgate what is not comprehended within these limits. But suppose it to come within them, there are also limits which determine the *manner* in which this truth may be promulgated.

Truth, in the sense in which it is explained above, is a valuable treasure, frequently the most valuable treasure of which we can be possessed.

On what do our hopes for eternity rest, our hopes of pardon and salvation and everlasting life, but on the truths of the Gospel, which have been communicated to us by others? But, valuable as even this treasure is, we have no right to *force* it upon another. I have no more right to fill my neighbor's pocket with diamonds, than with gravel stones, unless *he consent*. I may *offer* him diamonds, but if he refuse to accept of them, he must go away without them: I cannot help it. If I offer him abundance, and he prefer poverty, I am not responsible. He must, after all, do as he pleases.

Such is the case in the present instance. I desire to communicate to my neighbor valuable truth. He has *the right* to hear it or not, and I may not, on any pretence, violate his right. He has the same right to the use of his ears, that I have to the use of my tongue. I may, if I please, plead with him, and entreat him to hear me. I may present to him all the motives with which I am acquainted, to induce him to attend to my instructions; but this is all. If he still persist, nay, if he will neither hear my truth, nor listen to the motives by which I urge him to do so, his decision is ultimate: I can do no more. I have no right to do any thing more. The reason of this is obvious. Every man believes his own

opinions to be true, and what could be a greater absurdity, than to allow every man to inflict upon his neighbor whatever conversation he pleased; nay, to oblige him by force to listen to it, simply because he supposed it to be true and important?

The same principle applies to assemblies of men. Men frequently assemble for particular purposes, and for those purposes alone; and it commonly happens, that they are obliged, by conventional etiquette or by necessity, to remain, for a time, together. I have no right to use this assembly, unless by universal consent, for the purpose of promulgating any other truth, than that which the persons present, assembled to hear. I have no right to address a political town-meeting on the subject of religion. I have no right to address an assembly for religious purposes, on the subject of politics, or any other subject foreign from that for which they really came together. If I am so addressed, I may complain of it as a grievance. The speaker obliges me to hear, what I have not consented to hear, and my consent to hear which, he has no reason to take for granted. He does not respect my right to the use of *my ears*, and I feel that that right is infringed. The case is the same in a steam-boat, or stage-coach, or on any occasion in which men



are, by accident or design, thrown together for a particular purpose.

The same principle holds, when truth, or what we believe to be truth, is printed, and may be addressed to another without oral communication. Every man has a right to determine what sort of opinions shall be brought into his house. He is responsible to God for the moral sentiments of those under his care, and this responsibility he could not execute, unless he held the power to direct what they should, and what they should not read. An infidel, knowing my sentiments, has no right to thrust obscene pamphlets under my door, and I have no more right to thrust my pamphlets under his. I have a right to go and inquire of him whether he will receive them. If he agree to it, well. I may then persevere in my labor of love, until he forbids me. If he refuse at the outset, for aught I see, his decision is ultimate. I can do no more. He is responsible for the result: I am guiltless.

That our Lord and his Apostles acted on this principle is, I think, evident. When the Samaritans would not receive the Savior, he went unto another city. His directions to his disciples are, "when they persecute you in one city, flee ye unto another." When a house or a city would not receive them, they were directed, leaving

that city, to shake off the dust of their feet for a testimony against them ; that is to say, as I suppose, as an indication that the responsibility for this rejection rested henceforth solely with themselves. And thus, when the Jews rejected the preaching of St. Paul, his invariable answer was, "seeing ye count yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo we turn to the Gentiles." The Apostle, in this reply, distinctly acknowledges the principle, that the right, so far as man is concerned, to refuse the blessings of salvation, is placed in the hands of every man ; and, that he is responsible to God and not to man, for the use of it. This is necessary to his existence as a moral agent. If such be the fact, in respect to so great a matter, the principle, of course, extends to every thing of inferior importance.

Such, then, are the limits within which we are restricted in the promulgation of truth. We are bound to set the truth before men. The decision of the question whether they will or will not receive it, rests ultimately with themselves. We have no authority to impose upon them knowledge, no matter what may be the importance of that knowledge, in violation of this their inalienable right.

But, suppose that although men are willing to hear us, they do not believe our statements, and

refuse to modify their conduct in obedience to our views of duty. What is then to be done? What arguments may we use to convince, what motives may we present to urge them?

It will at once appear, that in questions of mere abstract truth, there is very little temptation to exceed the proper limitations of argument. The question is decided by simple intellect, and if a man do not admit what is logically proved, or, if he maintain as truth what has been logically shown to be false, we coolly leave him to the enjoyment of his opinions. In mathematical reasoning, we merely show that a proposition is true or that it is false; and having done this, we are satisfied. We hold ourselves responsible to furnish, not brains, but arguments, and having furnished arguments, we leave our opponent to himself.

Thus, also, when we promulgate a law of nature, which it is, manifestly, for a man's interest to follow, we do not trouble ourselves with any attempt to *persuade him to obey it*. We always take it for granted, that his own self interest will dictate to him the course most desirable for him to pursue. If I can show men that a lightning-rod will save a building from danger in a thunder storm, that the cost is very small, and that thus, annually, much valuable property and many

valuable lives may be saved, I am not bound to do any more. It is always taken for granted, that every man is qualified to judge for himself, whether it be best for *him* to avail himself of such knowledge. Nay, any particular earnestness on the subject very naturally begets the suspicion, that I have some personal interest in the matter. If I were to go around the country, urging every man to procure a lightning rod for his house, and press the *duty* upon him with all the earnestness of a subscription book-agent, the spontaneous question of every one would be, Have you any lightning rods to sell?

The only case in which we feel the necessity either of presenting argument or of urging motives, is, when the question at issue involves a change of practice as the result of change of belief. The change which we desire to produce, may, here, be opposed to the passions and immediate self interests of men; and we cannot hope for success, unless the influence of these be in some way counteracted. What arguments and what motives are we at liberty to use, in order to work in men the change which we desire?

In order to decide this question, it is necessary to remark, that the man himself, and the circumstances in which he is placed, are both the workmanship of God. The Creator has bestowed

upon him an intellect to discover truth, and also to be affected by it when truth is presented before him. Man is endowed with a conscience by which he distinguishes between right and wrong, when, stripped of irrelevant circumstances, a purely moral question is presented before him. He is also endowed with a sensitiveness to happiness and misery, by which he is rendered keenly alive to the consequences of actions. And, on the other hand, every truth which God requires us to believe, may be proved by such evidence, as is sufficient to convince an unbiassed mind. Every duty which God enjoins, is so justly enjoined, that none but a wilfully perverse conscience can fail to feel its obligation. And lastly, the consequences which he has attached to moral actions, are precisely those which he has judged most suitable for controlling human action and influencing human will.

If this be the fact, it will be evident, that in the effort to persuade men to believe our opinions, we are bound to present such arguments as God himself has presented; that is, to use no argument which we do not believe to be logically sound, and to assert nothing as fact, which we do not believe to be strictly and literally true. If we exaggerate, or conceal, or mystify, for the purpose of advancing what we believe to be true, we in-

sult the God of truth whose ministers we profess to be. If we attempt to make men feel that a course of conduct is wrong, we must present it in the moral relations which it holds in the sight of God. I have no right, for the sake of carrying a measure, or stirring up an excitement, or swaying the popular opinion, to urge, as a matter of universal obligation, what God has left as a matter to be decided by every man's conscience; to make that out to be a crime, in *every instance*, which God has made a crime only under *special circumstances*; or to urge as a duty by *command*, what can only be made out to be a duty *by inference*. In a word, I am to take the law of God just as I find it; with all the distinctness and with all the obscurity in which he has left it. We are to "commend" this, just as it is, without increase or diminution, "to *men's consciences*, IN THE SIGHT OF GOD." We are to tell men what is the will of God, as he has revealed it, just as though God himself were present, hearing every word that we speak, while we profess to be his representatives. To act otherwise, is, clearly, to assume to be ourselves the lawgivers; it is to claim for ourselves authority over the consciences of our brethren; it is to insult the most High himself, by our own most insufferable arrogance.

If God have commanded me to announce his will to my fellow men, it is my duty to announce his will. But this gives me no authority to announce, *as his will*, any thing which he has not commanded. And I must announce it, precisely as he has revealed it. I have no discretion whatever in the matter. If he have plainly commanded or forbidden any thing, I may say plainly that he has commanded or forbidden it ; and, in doing so, I must point to the enactment, and urge it on the authority of " thus saith the Lord." If he have prescribed one duty, and I infer another duty from it, I must announce this second duty, not as *his command*, but as *my inference*. I have no right to urge it as a general command of God. This inference may bind my conscience, but it can, as my inference, bind the conscience of no one else. Every one must in such a case be left to his own judgment ; and I have no right to accuse another of disobedience to God, unless he admit that he is for himself convinced of the duty, and then disregard it. Thus, God has commanded all men to repent. This is an universal duty, and I may urge it upon all men. God commands all men to use the things of this world as not abusing them. This I may also urge on the same authority. I infer that a particular kind of meat or drink is forbidden. Then this in-



ference will bind me, but I have no right to demand that the conscience of my neighbor be bound *by my inference*. Mahomet forbade wine, under all circumstances. A Mahomedan may therefore in the same manner forbid it, on the authority of his master. A disciple of Christ cannot so forbid it, on the authority of *his* master, unless he can show that Christ himself, or his apostles thus forbade it. If he infer, from some other precept, that it is to be abstained from, then the moral obligation is contingent, or accidental ; that is, it binds, in those cases, where the use of wine would conflict with obedience to that precept, and it binds in no other ; and of such case, every individual is to be the judge for himself.

It may be said that we cannot carry forward the temperance reformation if we adopt this principle. To this I have very little to reply. If we cannot carry forward the temperance, or any other reformation, without making God say what he has not said, and assuming a different moral standard from that which he has established, I think the cause must, at the outset, be desperate. And, after all, how is the thing to be helped ? I may wish that God had said differently ; I may seem to see that I could do much more good if he had given a different command. But, if he *have not given it*, there the matter rests, and I am not re-

sponsible for the result. But, before I find fault with the laxity of the moral law of my Creator, would it not be wise to begin by distrusting myself? Have I not reason to fear, that there is an error somewhere, when I seem to be more zealous for righteousness, than he "who is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity?"

Again: We are restricted as to the *motives* which we may urge, for the purpose of inducing men to obey the commands of God. The facts in the case I suppose to be these. God has appointed for his moral creatures certain courses of conduct. To obedience and to disobedience to his will, he has affixed such consequences as seemed meet unto himself. What these consequences should, in each case, be, he is the only competent judge, and no one has a right to question his decision: much less to alter, to modify, or to reverse it. Now in urging men to obey his will, we are bound to set before them precisely the consequences which he has attached both to obedience and to disobedience. We have no right either to create these consequences or to represent them to be any other than he has ordained. If we do this, we usurp his authority. We, then, not only "judge," but usurp the right to punish "another man's servant." We assume to know better than the universal lawgiver,

what is the desert of crime ; and to be more holy than the Holy One of Israel.

That I have no right to add to, or diminish the motives which God has presented to men, is evident. If the motives which he has presented will not influence them, I cannot help it. It will never do for me to make a lie about it. I am not responsible for the result. I need not, surely, affect to love the souls of men better than the Savior himself. If the motives which he has presented, are all that he saw fit to present, I may reasonably conclude that no love of mine to the souls of men can ever improve upon them.

But still more. I have no right to affix to any action, any other consequences than those which God himself has affixed to it. To some actions he has affixed certain and inevitable results. To others the results are contingent ; they may occur in one case and not in another, and I am unable to tell in what case they will and will not occur. I have no right to assign, as certain, a consequence to an action, when that consequence is merely accidental : that is, when it may, or may not, occur. God has declared, that unless a man repent he will never be saved. This is a certain result : I may always and every where so declare it. If a man do not repent *now*, under my particular sermon, he *may* never be saved. This

*may* be his last offer of mercy. I may so state it. But I have no right to state that if he do not now, at this time, repent, his soul *will* certainly be lost. He may be lost if he come not forward to the "anxious seats," and he may be saved if he do. But God has not commanded him to come forward to the "anxious seats;" and though I may, if I think it will be useful to him, advise him, (as my advice merely,) to come forward, I have no right to urge it as the command of God; much less, have I a right to assure him, that his salvation actually depends upon his doing or not doing this particular thing.

Against all this, it may be objected that these, and similar measures, have frequently been attended with good results. Were it not that I respect the *motive* from which such an objection proceeds, I would not think it worthy of a reply. It manifestly admits the principle, that I have a right to impose upon the consciences of men, as a duty commanded by God, any act whatever, provided I have reason to believe that, in particular instances, such act has been attended with a good result. I have known swearing, and Sabbath breaking, made the means of men's conversion; but have I, therefore, a right to command men to swear or to break the Sabbath? Besides, if such be the case, where shall liberty

of conscience find a resting place? This principle involves the very essence of Romanism, in the darkest periods of its sad existence. I affirm it, as historical fact, that the most odious additions which the Romish Church has ever made to the commands of God, were, at the beginning, made upon this very principle. On this very ground were monasteries, religious orders, and auricular confession established. In fact, we may easily see, if we will take the trouble to observe, that the abuses of that church, germinate, not in the bosoms of men of *a particular order*, but in the soil of human nature itself. Every man is liable to desire to wield the authority of God, for the accomplishment of *his own* purposes. In so far as any man carries this desire into action, in so far is *that man a Catholic*.\*

\* It is sad to observe the afflictive results which in Catholic countries ensue, from the errors to which I have here alluded. Who, without a sigh, can read the following description of the condition to which the moral system of that church reduces its miserable victims? “The odious diligence of the Catholic morality, has raked together an endless catalogue of sins in thought, word and deed; to every one of which the punishment of eternal flames has been assigned. The list, alike horrible and disgusting, haunts the imagination of the unfortunate devotee, till reduced to a state of perpetual anxiety, she can neither speak, think nor act without a sin, which invalidates all her past sacrifices, and dooms her

In the last place I remark, that, whilst we have a right to inform men of the consequences which will follow from disobedience to the laws of God, individuals have no right to *create these consequences* themselves. If God declare that he will inflict a particular punishment upon a transgressor of his law, we may be assured that he will do it. If he bid us forewarn the offender, we are obliged to forewarn him. But this gives us no right to punish him ourselves. This latter act God reserves for himself. We cannot assume it without usurping his authority. He foretold that the children of Ham should be servants of servants; but this is a very sorry reason for enslaving the Africans. The prophets

painful efforts after christian perfection to end in everlasting misery. Absolution, which adds boldness to the resolute and profligate, becomes a fresh source of disquietude to a timid and sickly mind. Doubts innumerable distress the unhappy sufferer; not, however, as to the power of the priest in granting pardon, but respecting her own fulfilment of the conditions, without which, to receive absolution is sacrilege. These agonizing fears, cherished and fed by the small circle of objects to which a nun is confined, are generally incurable, and usually terminate in untimely death or insanity."—*Blanco White's Letter from Spain.*

Such are the *results* which legitimately flow from "*measures*" for the promotion of piety, not founded on the simple word of God.

foretold that the children of Abraham should be "a people scattered and feeble, a hissing and a by-word;" but this is a very poor excuse for persecuting the Jews. So, it is a fact, that a drunkard comes to poverty and contempt; but this is no reason why we should take it *upon ourselves* to render him poor and contemptible. He who is engaged in any immoral traffic, will, in a healthy state of the community, lose the estimation in which he would otherwise be held by his fellow citizens. We may do all in our power to elevate the standard of the public morals; but we have no right, by our direct act, to destroy the estimation in which this or any other man is held. We may tell a man that such consequences will follow, and thus urge him to act virtuously; but we have no right to bring in our own efforts in aid of the authority of God, and tell the man, that, if he do not obey God, we will ruin his reputation.

Such seem to me to be some of the limitations within which our efforts for the promulgation of truth are restricted. We are limited as to the *matter* and the *manner* of propagating it; and as to the *motives* which we are at liberty to urge, in order to induce men to obey it. If we cannot propagate it without violating these limitations, it ceases to be our duty to propagate it, and our



responsibility for the result, be that result what it may, from that moment ceases.

If these be not the true limitations, where shall any limitations be found? How shall any man judge when or where his responsibility ceases? How shall any man distinguish between the commands of God, and the commands of his fellow men? In a word, how shall we escape a tyranny over conscience, more intolerable than that of Rome itself, by as much as the tyranny of many is worse than the tyranny of one? It matters not how pure may be the *motives* prompting to a conduct which leads to this result: the result itself is not the less deplorable, nor is it to be guarded against with any the less care.

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## SECTION SIXTH.

### OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS.

It is not necessary, in commencing a discussion of this subject, to repeat the eulogiums which have been so frequently lavished upon voluntary associations. They have been denominated the peculiar glory of the present age, so emphatically the age of valuable inventions. They are frequently supposed to be the great moral means, by which the regeneration of the

world is to be effected. They are believed to multiply, almost indefinitely, moral power, and to give to virtue a predominance over vice, which, in former ages, it never has possessed. In fact, could we confidently believe the one half of what we hear upon this subject, we might hope that the triumph over all the forms of evil was almost achieved, and that we had only to set at work this new form of labor-saving machinery, and with folded hands quietly look on and witness the glorious result.

That all this, however, is not true, it scarcely becomes a single individual, in the face of public opinion, to deny. It all *may* be true. If it be revealed truth, I will not question it. If it be not *revealed* truth, it may surely without offence be questioned. If such power have been given to voluntary associations, an inquirer may reasonably ask, whence has it been derived, and from what peculiarity in voluntary associations does it emanate? And, again, if such stupendous power exist, may it not be used, like any other power, for evil as well as for good? and what are the limits within which its rightful exercise should be restricted? Some of these questions I propose to consider in the present section. My object, so far as I am conscious of it, is simply to investigate and to set forth the truth. I will frankly con-

fess, that reflection on this subject, has led me to some results which I had not anticipated.

In order to disengage this question from any extraneous considerations, I will, at once, remark, that with many, nay, I may say, with most of the voluntary associations of the present day, I have in these pages, nothing to do. Many of them are, principally, organizations, for the sake of convenience in the collection and transmission of funds, in support of objects of unquestionable utility. They have a constitution, and various officers; but these, for the most part, are merely matters of form. The most important office is that of collector. The members bind themselves to no particular belief. The only requisite for membership is the payment of a certain sum of money. When this payment ceases, membership ceases, and no question is asked. The seceding member neither forfeits any social privilege, nor is exposed to any odium; he has changed his opinions respecting the object, or his means are less ample; or he does not choose any longer to appropriate them in this manner: and his decision in this case is always held to be ultimate and without offence. There is no principle brought to bear upon him but his individual sense of duty; and he acts, in respect to the matter of this society, as in respect to every other, from

the sole dictates of his understanding and conscience.

Besides, in respect to most of these societies, it may be remarked, that their *object* is the fulfilment of a duty specially commanded, and not derived from inference. God has *made known* to us our duty to preach the gospel to every creature. The *manner* in which the association proposes to accomplish this object is definitely ascertained. It is for instance by circulating the sacred scriptures, or by sending the living teacher to preach the gospel to the destitute. This can violate no right whatever. It is only doing *as a society*, what every one is under moral obligation to do as an individual ; and doing it in the same manner, and precisely under the same responsibility. Against associations conducted on these principles, leaving the full individuality of the man always entire and untouched, I do not see that any general objection can be urged.

Against these, however, a particular objection has sometimes been urged, which I here barely mention, in passing, for the sake of caution. They are liable to render benevolence too public, and thus deprive it of somewhat of its peculiar excellence, namely, that it is a service performed specially unto God. They are liable to diminish, somewhat, the feeling of individual responsibility,

and to lead to the belief, that benevolence consists merely in giving money, and that thus we may be excused from personal service and self denial in the cause of charity. They have a natural tendency to do away with the *personal intercourse* between the benefactor and the recipient, an intercourse so beneficial to both parties; and to substitute in its room the intercourse of an agent with the recipient, by which both parties are but in the smallest manner improved. The moral feelings of charity and of gratitude, are, in themselves, not only delightful, but in the highest degree salutary. By such feelings, both parties are made better. A moral loss is always sustained, where the material act of charity is performed, without the gain to either party, of the spiritual good which our Creator intended us to receive from it. I mention these things only by way of caution. I suggest them for the sake of drawing the attention of benevolent persons to them; and with the hope that voluntary associations of unquestionable utility, may be led to attain the highest excellence of which they are capable.

There exist, however, other voluntary associations, of a different character, and from which even far greater benefits have been expected, than from those to which I have alluded. I refer

to those, whose object it is to produce a change either in the opinions or the practices of the community. That this object may be highly desirable in particular cases, there can be no doubt. It is an act of benevolence to convince men of error. It is a still more meritorious act of benevolence to persuade them to the practice of virtue. That such is the object of all the voluntary associations of the present day, I am willing to admit. I impeach the motives of no man.—Nay, I am willing to admit that all who are laboring in these associations, private members, officers and agents, are influenced by pure philanthropy. This will not in the least affect my argument. My business is neither with the object in view, nor with the motives of those who are engaged in promoting it, but simply with the question, what advantages the cause derives from this mode of promoting it; to what evils is this mode of promoting it liable, and how may these evils best be remedied.

To bring this question at once to an issue, let us ask, What are the *precise points* in which *associated*, differ from *unassociated* individuals? In these points must consist the peculiarity of voluntary associations; from these must arise their power of good or of evil, and by these must their practical utility be tested.

Let us suppose that there exist, in any community, one thousand men, each one of whom is convinced of the truth of a particular doctrine, and disposed, by all suitable means, as an individual, to persuade men to a correspondent practice. Each one would then, by the quiet process of conversation, and argument and example, be making as many converts as he could to his own particular views. He would be moved by the mere love of truth, and by the interest which he felt in its promulgation. Each person whom he met, would have no ground of opposition, aside from that which arose from disbelief of the doctrine, or the ordinary prejudice which he might entertain against the practice. The cause would thus stand or fall, would be advocated or opposed, on the simple ground of its own merits, as true or false, good or bad, wise or unwise.

Such would be the case if these one thousand persons acted as individuals and not as a voluntary association. They would be in the natural state of mind for either convincing or for being convinced, and they would meet the rest of the community upon the same terms.

Suppose, now, these one thousand persons to be united into a voluntary association, pledging themselves to each other and to the public, to propagate this particular sentiment, and to pro-



mote the observance of this correspondent practice. Let us see in what respects they have, by this act, been changed, and in what respects they are the better able to promote the object in view.

It will appear at once, that their number is no greater than it was before. They were one thousand persons before—they are one thousand now. By this act they have gained no convert, but remain, in this respect, entirely unchanged.

Their opinions have gained nothing, either in truth or in importance. These were just as true or just as false, when one believed them, as when a thousand believed them; and just as true or just as false when they believed them separately, as when they believed them, associated together.

Such being the case, the attachment of these persons to the doctrines themselves, as *true*, cannot be increased by this act. This is self-evident, for the *union* of men in a belief is no more an argument in its favor, than their belief of it, disunited. Whatever additional attachment, therefore, may be thus created, must be extraneous to the thing itself, and disconnected from the consideration of its truth or its falsehood, its importance or its unimportance.

The simple difference, then, seems to be, that in the case of a voluntary association, individuals

are *pledged* to each other and to the public, to uphold these sentiments, and to promote these practices. The question arises, what are the peculiar advantages or disadvantages of *the pledge*? for in this, must, I think, reside the peculiarity of voluntary associations.

1. It imposes the form of a moral obligation to believe a particular sentiment, and to perform a particular act. Now, if the man's sentiments continue as they at present are, this pledge will be of no avail, on the one side or the other; for having resolved on a course because it is right, he will pursue it because it is right, whether he have pledged himself to another to do so, or not. But, supposing him to doubt on the question, or to view it afterwards in some other light, there then arises a conflict of moral impulses. On the one hand, he knows that he ought not to do what he doubts to be right, or to profess what he fears may be untrue; on the other hand, he has *pledged* himself to believe and to practise this very thing; and this promise is strengthened by the dread of loss of reputation on the ground of inconsistency. There is, in such case, a strong obstacle thrown in the way of this man's professing precisely what he believes to be true, and of doing precisely what he believes to be right. Now, as the object of every good man is neither

to advocate either this or that thing, but always to do what is right, it will, I think, appear evident, that this *pledge* can have no effect to promote this result, but the contrary. Where his belief remains the same, the pledge is nugatory ; when his belief is changed, it is really in the way of his advocating what he believes to be truth, and practising what he believes to be righteousness.

The only case, in which a pledge of this kind can be safely given, is, where a man is in danger of a practice, which he knows to be wrong, and yet to which he is liable to be strongly tempted. Here he uses the moral restraint of a promise, and of the fear of inconsistency, as an antagonist force against the sudden impulses of passion. In such cases it may not only be innocent but salutary.

2. So far, then, as the effect of the pledge is exerted, a man thus situated, would be peculiarly inaccessible to conviction. He is pledged, not to truth itself, but to a particular sentiment. But, since he is not infallible, he may be at least partly wrong, as well as other men. The pledge does not make his belief at all the more true. But if we argue with him, we are obliged, in order to change his views, first to convince him of his error, as we would do with other men ; and

then, moreover, to remove the difficulties arising from the pledge, and from the fear of inconsistency. Hence, in discussing with him the matter in dispute, we feel that we do not stand on the same ground as with other men. Extraneous difficulties have been thrown in the way in *his* case, which, in the case of other men, do not exist.

3. Now, the conviction in the minds of other men that such is his condition, produces a correspondent effect upon them. They look upon him as a prejudiced man, as a man who is pledged to a particular course, whether he believe it to be true and right, or whether he believe it to be false and wrong. Hence, *his* arguments fall pointless upon *them*. He loses the power, which a disputant always acquires, from the universal belief that he is candid, frank and open to conviction. And, hence, I think it will be generally seen, in actual life, that other things being equal, the arguments and the practice of a person unpledged, have, with the opposers of the doctrine in question, a much stronger effect, than the arguments and the practice of one who is pledged.

So far, therefore, as there is a gain in zeal, by virtue of a pledge, it is a zeal arising out of something extraneous to the merits of the question. So far as other persons are concerned, they are rendered, by this very circumstance, suspicious

of the motives of the person, and thus, less liable to be convinced.

I have thus far supposed these opinions to be true. But whether they be so or not, is yet to be decided. All we can properly affirm is, that the persons thus associated *believe* them to be true. Others may assuredly believe them to be false. Suppose others thus actually to believe them. They, on the same principle, may associate themselves for the purpose of promoting the opposite opinions, and may bind themselves by a similar pledge. These two associations are thus, by these very means, shut out from any hope of being convinced by each other's arguments. A solid column is met by a solid column, and both must stand stock still. Each party is angry because the other will not be convinced, while each one has pledged itself never to admit of conviction. The animosity becomes universal. Forgetting the argument, both parties resort to denunciation. Truth and the cause of truth are forgotten. And the world at large, in dislike of the conduct of both parties, comes at last, to very loathing of the whole question at issue.

If we consider voluntary associations, therefore, as means for the propagation of truth, I do not perceive that they possess any special advantages;

on the contrary, I think, when considered as means for this special purpose, they are exposed to some manifest disadvantages. I think, moreover, that they are liable to other accidental evils, which are not entirely unworthy of a passing consideration.

It is obvious that when two distinct motives prompt us to any particular course of action, they are liable to become confounded with each other. When one of these motives is dependent for its existence, simply upon moral principle, and the other derives its strength from the less elevated but more boisterous principles of our nature; there is great danger lest the latter usurp the supremacy, and thus the act completely change its moral character. For this reason, our Lord commands us, in acts of charity, not to let our "left hand know what our right hand doeth." Not that it is wrong to desire the good opinion of men, but lest, by acting from this motive, it should in the end supplant the other; and thus, charity, which ought to be a duty to God, become a mere artifice for winning the applause of men.

Such is the case in the present instance.—Whenever men are pledged to each other and before the world, the feeling of clanship is immediately awakened; every man is looked upon as a member or not a member of the party. Every

associate feels a share of personal triumph in victory, and of personal degradation in defeat ; and, if these sentiments are only kept alive by frequent assemblings, and are stimulated into activity by the oratory of the vehement and the clamorous, they soon become the settled habit of the soul. Here, then, a motive to action is created, aside from the love of truth and righteousness ; and, being in perfect harmony with many of the most impulsive principles of the soul, it is *liable* to acquire the absolute ascendancy. But, it unfortunately happens, that where such contingencies exist, the result always shows the chances to be greatly against our unfortunate human nature. When so great a liability to do wrong, exists, it may safely be asserted that the wrong will be done. And hence, in the end, it generally happens, that whatever may have been the object, for which a pledged association has been formed, in process of time the *object* attracts less and less, and the association itself greater and greater, attention.

Nor is this all. When men are thus associated, it is well known that their feeling of moral responsibility is vastly less acute than when they act as individuals. Associations will perpetrate acts, at which every member of the association would individually revolt. Hence, the common



proverb that "corporate bodies have no consciences." The leaders throw the responsibility upon the members, and the members throw it back again upon the leaders, and between the two, we find that although the thing has been done, yet who is to be blamed for it, it is by no means easy to ascertain.

When men are thus associated in masses, the impulsive forces being strengthened, and the restraints of moral responsibility weakened, that evils must necessarily result, it surely is not difficult to foresee. It sometimes happens, that power may be gained, and the supremacy of the association insured, by coalition with a political party. It is not difficult, for the *sake of doing so much good*, to negotiate such a coalition.—Hence, it has not unfrequently happened, that the votes of whole masses of men have been bought and sold in the political shambles at a discount. At other times, the spirit of the association can be kept up in no other manner, than by advancing from innocent to questionable measures, in order thus to arouse opposition, and bring small men and small things into prominent and distinct notoriety. In this manner, the primary object of the association is lost sight of, and the thing itself becomes a mere system of machinery, working for no other purpose than

for the advancement of turbulent and selfish agitators.

This may seem theory. I wish it were nothing else. The history of the present age shows that it has all been not unfrequently carried into practice. For instance, what is a Trades Union, but a voluntary association? Its avowed object is, to protect the laborer from the oppression of the capitalist. Now this object by itself, supposing the danger really to exist, would seem virtuous and honorable; for what is more iniquitous than oppression, and what more worthy of respect than resistance to it? But who does not know, that this associated interference, by which a power of redress is created, unknown to the laws, and by which, in order to carry its purposes into effect, the rights of individuals have been remorselessly trampled upon, has wrought the most grievous mischiefs both to capitalist and to laborer? What were the *French Jacobin clubs*, but *voluntary associations*? At first, they were mere societies for the harmless purpose of discussing theoretical questions of civil politics.—Soon they were changed into associations, for the purpose of carrying into practice those views which they supposed themselves to have demonstrated. They were next multiplied, by the establishment of affiliated branches in every town

of France, (each one, however, governed and directed by the central association in Paris,) until they were able to control the public sentiment of the nation. They then boldly assumed the government of the empire. The throne and the legislative assemblies were both prostrate at their feet. The right of franchise, that palladium of liberty, was valueless; for elect whom you would to be a legislator, he dared not disobey the mandate of the club. Legislative proceedings were regularly decided upon, in the meetings of these voluntary associations, before they were brought forward in the assembly; and the representatives of the people did nothing but record the mandates of a sanguinary mob. Thus was a tyranny enacted, to which the history of the world affords no parallel; and all this was done by men, who, at first, were associated to discuss abstract principles of right, and who were merely pledged to carry into effect some truly salutary measures of reform.

Again: if voluntary associations are *the* appropriate means for promulgating what we believe to be truth, and for establishing what we believe to be right, then every thing which we believe to be true and right is to be promoted and established in this manner. As the views of men are very diverse on this subject, every

opinion should enlist men together in this manner. The result would be, that every one would be pledged on every subject, and all his sympathies would be enlisted either for or against every one of his fellow citizens. Judges, juries, executive officers, of the general and of the state governments, would all be linked together in support of purposes entirely foreign from those for which society is instituted. It was against this injustice that lord Erskine protested, in his celebrated "Declaration of the friends of the liberty of the press." At that time, owing to a fear of sedition, which, for political reasons, had been fostered by the ministry, a number of voluntary, affiliated societies had been established, for the purpose of informing against and prosecuting the authors of all inflammatory and libellous publications. Lord Erskine contended that such societies were assuming to themselves a power unknown to the constitution, and that, moreover, they were destroying, by their acknowledged partisan character, all that was valuable in trial by jury.

But, it is needless to go into farther specifications. If what I have already suggested be worthy of the least consideration, I think it must be evident that voluntary associations are not, as many persons have supposed, an instrument ca-

pable of nothing but unalloyed good, but like any other instrument, a means for accomplishing our purposes, capable alike of benefit and of injury. They may be employed for improper as well as for proper purposes ; and when at first employed for proper purposes, they may be so directed as to work, *in the end*, very signal mischief. The history of human opinions also teaches us, as we have seen, that these views are very far from being chimerical, and that these very evils, not only are liable to result, but that they actually have resulted. If such be the fact, enough has been said to show the very great importance of understanding the limitations arising from the objects to which they may be safely applied, and from the manner in which they may be safely employed. I have already, however, treated this preliminary branch of the subject so much at large, that it becomes me to study brevity in offering a few suggestions on the points which remain.

In order to guard voluntary associations from the evils to which they are manifestly exposed, I think the following limitations should be strictly observed :

1. The *object* for which men associate should be capable of so exact and palpable definition, that it may be always clearly distinguished from

every other that might from time to time be amalgamated with it. It should not only be *capable* of such definition, but it should, moreover, be actually and palpably defined. When this is done, every one will have it in his power, at once, to know whether or not such object has at any time been departed from or transcended.

2. The *manner* in which it is proposed to carry such object into effect, should be clearly and accurately set forth. Unless this be done, no one will know when he unites in such an association, what course of conduct he may or may not be held responsible for. If I agree to unite in promoting an object by all *suitable* means, I leave the question of suitableness to be decided upon by a committee, or by a majority, and hence may make myself responsible for acts of the most unquestionable wrong.

3. The object itself, and the manner in which it is to be promoted, should be perfectly and entirely *innocent*; that is, they must be such as are incapable of violating the rights of any human being. As individuals, we are under moral obligation to adopt this rule. How much more, when we act in masses, proverbially liable to err, either from excitement, from party spirit, or from confidence in their own power. Unless these principles be adopted, voluntary associa-

tions will manifestly tend to retard rather than advance the progress of truth ; and they will be among the most fruitful sources of mischief to a free community.

Again. Some limitations will naturally suggest themselves as important to be observed by the members of voluntary associations, in their relations *with each other*. For instance :

1. Inasmuch as a voluntary association is an association for effecting a particular *object* in a particular *manner*, and as this object and this manner are specified, it is evident that no one can properly unite in it, unless he do really approve both of the object itself, and also of the manner in which it is to be accomplished. I do not say that he cannot unite in it if he believe *more* than his associates ; but I do say that he cannot honestly unite with them, unless he believe at least as much as they.

2. Inasmuch as the object and manner are specified, and cannot properly be changed in any essential particular, without unanimous consent, the character of such an association, is, from the nature of the case, essentially unalterable. But since every man is bound to hold himself, at every moment, open to conviction, upon every subject whatever, provided only sufficient reason for a change of opinion be presented to him ; no



man should place himself in any situation, from which there will arise any obstacles to his embracing the truth, whenever and wherever he may find it. Hence, no man should join any voluntary association, under any pledge either expressed or implied, which shall render his motives for change of opinion specially liable to be called in question. And if any man be convinced, that, from the state of public opinion, such an influence is liable to be exerted over him, this, of itself, would be a reason, and frequently a *sufficient* reason, why he should let such association alone.

3. As every man is responsible for the use which he voluntarily allows to be made of his name and opinions, every man, as soon as he disapproves either of the objects of a voluntary association or of its manner of accomplishing them, is under obligation to withdraw. He has no more right to allow his name to go forth ostensibly in favor of what he now believes to be wrong, than he would have to declare his approbation of it under his own signature. The case is the same, when either the object or the manner has, without his consent, been changed. He is here under obligation to withdraw, both on the ground of difference of opinion, and because the principle has been assumed that the influence

and character of every man are subject to the arbitrary decision of a numerical majority.

4. And, on the contrary, the majority is bound to abide in entire strictness and good faith, by the precise terms of the contract. They have no power to do any thing in a manner different from that which was specified in the original compact. The moment any departure is made from the original agreement, the association is, in fact, dissolved. The individual members agreed to unite for one specific purpose ; if the purpose be changed, another association is formed, with which the previous members have nothing to do, unless they form a new and different compact. Thus, suppose I join a temperance society, by signing a pledge to abstain from spirituous liquors, and by my example and precept, in such manner as I think proper, to promote temperance among my fellow men. This is a distinct and definite matter. It binds me to a particular and specified course of conduct. But this is all. I delegate nothing to any one. I put myself in no one's power. I surrender neither my understanding, nor my conscience, nor my liberty, to any man, nor to any set of men. I am in all these things as I was before.

But, now, suppose that a majority of those who have associated themselves with me, under the

same pledge, but whom very likely I have never even seen, resolve that this pledge shall be altered, and that it shall also include something else; that is, assume to themselves the right to *pledge me, without my consent*, and to a matter wholly without the contract. Suppose they go farther, and discuss the ethical reasons of my pledge, and give to the world a reason for my conduct, which I have never given. Suppose they go farther still, and take it upon themselves to decide upon a command of Christ, imposing upon me a religious duty, or to settle for me a question of historical or philological criticism. Suppose they go farther still, and decide for me, what are the modes in which the temperance cause is to be promoted, and select, as one of these modes, the holding up to public scorn all who deal in spirituous liquors. And, suppose that the majority of the particular association to which I chance to belong, not only do this for me, but send delegates to a general convention in which all these matters are to be discussed, and decided upon, for every one who has, like myself, pledged himself to the simple matter in which all this originated.

I claim it as a right here, that I be not misrepresented. I am saying nothing as to the *merits* of any of these questions, as for instance whether one

liquor or another may or may not be innocently drunk, whether the use of alcohol is a sin *per se*, whether wine at the Lord's supper is to be rejected, or whether it be lawful to administer the punishment of sarcasm and invective, in order to prevent the use of spirituous liquors. Nor have I said a word respecting the propriety of *discussing* these or any other subjects, either publicly or privately, by any one who chooses to do so. On these points, in the present case, I have no controversy. I only ask, what have these questions to do with a temperance society, constituted as I have supposed, and what authority is given, by the temperance pledge, to any persons, majority or minority, in primary assemblies or in convention, to decide such questions for me or for any one else? They are all questions which every one must decide for himself, and which no one can decide for another. It is surely blank arrogance, for any one to volunteer to decide them for another, when the latter has committed to him no such authority.

In making these remarks, I trust it will not be supposed, that I am capable of any hostility to the temperance cause. Of its object every one must approve. Still, it is as true in this case as in any other, that honest zeal may be sometimes misdirected. The better the cause,

the greater is the need that it be rescued from the reproach of wrong doing.

And lastly, there are limitations to voluntary associations, arising from their relations to the public.

I do not see that men, when voluntarily associated together, have acquired any rights which do not belong to any individual, whether in, or out of, the association. They may, of right, do nothing which an individual may not do. They may do nothing, in any manner different from that in which an individual may do it. The fundamental principle on which civil society is established, is, that every individual is equal in point of right with every other individual. If I associate with any other individuals, for the sake of enabling myself to do, with impunity, what any other man may not do with impunity, I violate the very first principles of the social compact. This was the evil of free masonry, and it is the evil to which all secret societies are liable. Every one remembers the indignation which was awakened throughout the community, when it was discovered that free masonry was capable of such an abuse. But, the same indignation would be justly excited against every voluntary association, if it were for a moment contended that the whole association collectively, or the single

members of it, individually, acquired, by the fact of their uniting together, any right which was not common to every other citizen.

The object of voluntary associations is, in general, the propagation of important truth; or the reformation of moral practice. In the preceding section, I have endeavored to illustrate the principles by which the powers and responsibility of *individuals* are, in this respect, limited. By the same principles are the powers and responsibility of associations limited. Some of the most important of these I suppose to be the following.

As to the *matter*: The obligation to publish harmless truth depends upon the obligations of general benevolence. The justification for the publication of truth, which may be injurious even to a single individual, must be founded on the paramount claims of justice or of benevolence. To publish it, without this justification, and simply because it is true, is gratuitous wickedness.

As to the *manner* of propagation: We are forbidden to propagate even innocent truth, in such a manner as to infringe the rights of the meanest individual.

As to the *means of conviction*: We are at liberty to present such motives as God himself has presented, but we are not at liberty to declare consequences which do not exist. While we may

present the consequences which God has affixed to the violation of his laws, we have no right, as associations, any more than as individuals, to create these consequences ourselves. If we do thus create them, it is a violation of right.

The principle which should govern in this case, I suppose to be this. In the very formation of civil society, we surrender the right of self-defence, and of redress of injuries, to society; and, of course, our individual right to punish for any offence, whether *personal* or *public*, ceases. If an offence be committed, it becomes the business of government, that is, of society, to punish it. The individual may inform against the offender, that is, he may move society to its duty, but he can do no more. He has no right to take the business of punishment into his own hands. It makes no difference, in principle, what the mode of punishment is, whether it be with the *pen*, or with the *club*, or with the *musket*—all are equally forbidden. If a man pursues a course which I consider improper, I have no more right to oblige him to relinquish it, by inflicting pain upon *his mind*, than upon *his body*; I have no more right to hold him and his family up to contempt, than I have to shoot him or pull down his house. And, if I possess not this right as an individual, I possess it not as a member of an



association, nor does the whole association, collectively, possess it any more than a single individual.

It may be said, that the laws frequently do not forbid, what is manifestly wrong. Granted; but if *they* do not forbid it, then *we* have no right to forbid it. In every society, the *majority* and not the *minority*, must rule. The laws are the will of the majority, and we must submit to the evil until we can persuade the majority to be of our opinion. So soon as this can be done, the laws will be altered. When the laws are on our side, we always plead their protection. But it is as right that they should protect others against us, as protect us against others. So long as a law exists, it must be obeyed, and no man nor any set of men, has the right to assume an authority, either *distinct* from the laws, or in opposition to them, or beyond them, on the ground that the laws do not come up to their notions of right, or on any other ground whatever.

Such are, as I suppose, some of the limitations within which the actions of voluntary associations are of right restricted, and such the limitations which I suppose necessary to prevent their abuse. If to this it be objected, that, if such restrictions be enforced, the good which associa-

tions might otherwise effect, would be greatly diminished, I answer, should this follow, I see no help for it. We may not do evil that good may come. We must not violate right for any purpose whatever. If any good whatever cannot be accomplished, without sanctioning principles which would prostrate all authority, and violate all right, then that good must, for the present, at least, be left undone. God forbids us, at present, or in this manner, at least, to accomplish it.

But will this result of necessity follow? I believe the contrary. The result which naturally flows from the admission of the principles which I have suggested, is simply this: Responsibility, instead of being thrown upon masses, would be thrown more distinctly upon individuals. Every man, instead of inquiring for the decision of the majority, would be obliged to decide for himself. Instead of following thoughtlessly the movement of public opinion, every man would learn to act from the promptings of individual conscience and duty. Public opinion would thus be formed by the deliberate reflection of every individual acting in the fear of God, instead of being formed by the clamor of men who "make a trade of philanthropy." Though of slower growth, it would be far more enduring

and far more effective. Formed on immutable principle, it would be felt to be unalterable. It is now in danger of losing all its salutary efficacy, either for the correction of vice, or the sustaining of virtue. A man of sense, perceiving its mutability, already laughs at by far the greater part of what passes under this name. He knows that he has only to wait, and the overtopping wave will burst upon the shore, and carry back to the depths of ocean the light things that just now were riding upon its foaming crest.

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## SECTION SEVENTH.

### OF ECCLESIASTICAL ASSOCIATIONS.\*

The religion of Jesus Christ unites men into societies, upon principles somewhat peculiar to itself. Wherever it exists, it creates immediately new and intimate relations, and gives rise to wide-spreading and active associations. It is intended that these associations should influence the con-

\* For the sake of removing all cause for misconception, I take this opportunity to state that I am a Baptist and an Independent; holding that believers alone are entitled to church membership, and that each church is independent of every other, and competent, in itself, to all the purposes of government and discipline. Of course, the remarks in the present section, so far as they relate to this subject, take these princi-

duct and character, not only of those by whom they are formed, but also of the community in general, in which they are embosomed. Such do we find to be actually the fact. The state of society, at any particular period, receives a decided tinge from the character of the religion which prevails in the midst of it. Spain, Italy, and Portugal bear as decidedly the impression of Catholicism, as New England does of stern, unbending Puritanism.

All this is as it should be. A religion would be worthless, which did not transform the things about it into its own image. But, while we affirm that such is the intention of its Founder, it is yet important to understand the *manner* in which he intended this influence to be exerted, and the *limits* within which he designed it to be restricted. In the present section, I propose to offer a few suggestions upon this subject.

A church of Christ is, manifestly, a voluntary association. No man joins it, unless he choose,

ples for granted. I do not state these articles of belief for the sake of proving them; for a discussion of this kind, this would not be the place; but merely for the sake of avoiding misunderstanding. Many of the remarks which follow, will of course be considered as inconclusive, by those who adopt different views of the nature and offices of a christian church. The argument is addressed to those who on these points believe as I do.

nor continues in it any longer than he will. The act is essentially and peculiarly spiritual. Unless the spirit goes with it, it is all void. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

But when men associate together as a society, there must always exist some object, for the promotion of which they are united; and some manner be proposed, in which this object is to be accomplished. Such is the case with a christian church. Its object is the promotion of holiness in the souls of its members, and in the souls of the men by whom they are surrounded. It is, in a word, to advance the kingdom of Christ, and to prepare themselves and others the better to meet the solemn awards of the day of judgment. The manner of doing this, is by enforcing upon each other the laws of the association, by stimulating and encouraging each other to obedience to those laws, and thus setting forth a public example of a society acting on the principles of the religion of Christ.

In most voluntary associations, men select their own object, and frame their own laws, and they are at liberty to do so. Such is the case with literary, philosophical, and various other societies. Such, however, is not always the case. Sometimes the laws of a society are established by our

Creator, and we have no right to form such society on any other principles, or to govern it by any other rules, than those which He has enacted. Such, for instance, is the case with civil society. It may be optional with men to live in solitude or in society ; but, if they form a civil society, they are bound to form it on the principles which God has prescribed. Men have, for instance, no right to form a society, on the principle that the majority can control the conscience of the minority, or interfere with the rights and duties of parents and children, or of husbands and wives. Such is also the domestic society. It is optional with men and women, whether they will form this society or not. But, if they form it, it must be done in conformity with the laws which God has established. They have no right to form it on the principle of polygamy, or divorce, or in any manner to make the laws, which relate to it, for themselves.

Now, a christian church is, emphatically, a society of this latter kind. Though each man enters it voluntarily, and all are under law, yet they have no right whatever to make laws for themselves ; they must both form and govern the association, by the laws which *Christ has made for them*. A willingness to obey his laws, gives a man *a right* to admission. So long as this

willingness continues, he has *a right* to remain. No one but Christ has any right to impose laws upon him. So long as he obey Christ, he is free of his brethren, as much as they are of him. Men, by uniting in a church with their fellow disciples, promise merely to obey Christ; they submit to him and not to each other. They surrender to each other no right to make laws for each other. They claim no right to enforce any laws but the laws of Christ; and to attempt to enforce any other, is to act in direct violation of the spirit of the association.

That which qualifies a man *essentially* for admission to the christian church, is real discipleship to Christ; or a temper of heart to obey him in every thing that he has revealed. This makes him a member of the holy Catholic church. But, besides this, there are various points of practical obedience, in respect to which real disciples may differ, and this difference, though it do not designate a different temper of heart, yet may nevertheless render it suitable and proper that those who think alike should associate more especially with each other. One man believes that Christ commands him to administer baptism to infants; another believes this to be the command and doctrine of men. Both may be equally willing to obey Christ, in whatever they suppose



Christ to have commanded. Both may be equally his disciples: yet it is evident that both could not unite together in the same church; for they could not practically obey the same commands. Various other illustrations of the same principle will readily occur. Hence arises the division of the church into different sects. It is the natural and healthy result of that freedom of opinion, which springs from Protestantism.

Practically, then, the qualifications for admission to any church of Christ, known by the name of a particular sect, is, first, the evidence of such a temper of mind as Christ has commanded, and secondly, such harmony of views in regard to external rites and minor observances, as may enable men to unite with each other in those religious ordinances, which they hold themselves bound to observe. He who possesses these qualifications, is entitled to admission, under those laws of the association which Christ has enacted; and he cannot be refused without a violation of those laws.

And, hence, no church has any right to make any thing a qualification for membership which Christ has not made such, or to demand of a candidate any promise which Christ has not demanded. It is in vain to say that, in this manner, we may greatly facilitate various important

and useful designs. This may or may not be. I shall neither admit nor deny it, for it has nothing to do with the question. The question is simply this: Has Christ himself made *this* a qualification for membership? If he have not, we have no right to make it. It is *Christ's* Church, and not *ours*. We have no more *right* to assume his power for a good purpose than for a bad one.

Suppose, now, several persons to have united in such an association. They have formed a society, of which Christ is the sole legislator. The only power which they have over each other, is to enforce upon each other obedience to his laws. These laws they may enforce upon his authority. Whatever he has commanded, they may command, and they may do it upon his authority. They have no discretionary power, either to add to, or to take from, any thing which he has enacted. To his authority every member is obliged to bow, but he is obliged to bow to no other.

The design of a christian church, in so far as its individual members are concerned, is the cultivation, in each member, of love toward God and toward man. In order to accomplish this, they may use any means which Christ has enjoined. Some acts are, manifestly, at variance with

this temper of mind ; these acts he has forbidden, and these, they also must forbid. Some other acts are directly subsidiary to the cultivation of this temper. These acts he has enjoined, and these they must also enjoin. In other cases, he has merely enjoined the temper of mind, and presented the motives which should excite it, and has left the manner of its outward manifestation to the understanding and conscience of each individual. We may do the same, but we must leave it where *he leaves it*. A church has no right to command, as a duty, a *particular mode* of showing our attachment to Christ, unless he has himself commanded it.

Thus, a church may exhort its members to temperance, and may assure them that no drunkard has any part in the kingdom of God ; it may enjoin upon me, whether I eat or drink, or whatever I do, to do all to the glory of God ; and if I violate this command, may, and ought to exclude me ; but it has no right to command me to join a temperance *society*, because this is not commanded by Christ ; and, because I may suppose that I can serve him more acceptably without joining it. It may assure me, that if I love not the souls of men I am not a disciple of Christ, for “he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not

seen ;” but it has no right to oblige me to join any particular benevolent *society*, whether missionary, or education, or bible society, or any other, because I may choose to show my love to Christ, in some other way than by joining either of them. If, however, I show myself destitute of love to God and man, by a life of sordid selfishness, they *ought* to exclude me. But so long as I do not evince that I am destitute of the right temper of heart, I am held guiltless ; the *mode* of manifesting this temper, is to be left to my own understanding and conscience.

And, if the whole have not the right to enjoin a single member, they have no right universally to enjoin one another ; for the right is in both cases, the same. They have, therefore, no right to resolve themselves into a temperance, or an abolition, or a missionary, or a peace, or any other society. These, if obligatory at all, are matters of special and individual obligation, and are, therefore, matters over which the church has no authority ; to resolve itself into such a society, is to assume such authority. It is to enjoin every member, whether he will or will not, not merely to have *the temper of heart*, but to show it forth *in this particular manner*.

The reason for this is obvious. If a church have a right to enjoin a particular matter *on its*

*own authority*, it has an equal right to forbid on the same authority ; for the right, in both cases, is the same. If a church may command me, on pain of exclusion, to do this particular good, in this particular way, it may, if it so choose, enjoin me on the same authority, to leave it undone. Now this is manifestly a most gross violation of right, and every one, not demented, so esteems it. Yet churches, in this country, have excluded members for this very reason. But the assumption of power, though in one case it has been done from good motives, and for good objects, and, in the other, I fear, from bad ones, is, in both cases, for aught I can see, precisely the same.

Nor is this all. If we surrender the doctrine that Christ is the *sole* legislator for every individual of his church, and allow that the church may itself make laws binding on the conscience of the individual, what is the result? We become Catholics at once. This is the very essence of the Romish error. That corrupt church assumes that it has the power and the right to bind the conscience in all matters both of faith and of practice ; and, upon this assumption, all the superstructure of her hideous superstition has been reared. But the principle is the same in both cases. If my conscience is to be bound by

my fellow men, it matters not whether these men be a conclave of bishops and cardinals, or whether they be my brethren whom I meet every day, and with whom I sit down around the same communion table. My brethren will, I doubt not, use this usurped authority more mildly, but this alters not the fact, that the authority is usurped, nor does it offer any guarantee that it may not, in the end, become as oppressive as the other.

In all this I claim again the privilege of being understood. I ask that it may be remembered, that I have, in no manner whatever, agitated the question of the goodness or badness of any of the associations to which I have referred, nor of the objects, for the promotion of which they have been formed. To many of them I suppose myself as firmly attached as any other man. The simple question here agitated, is that of the duties and responsibilities of a *christian church*, and not that of the duties and responsibilities of an *individual christian*. It is very clear that it may be *my* duty to do many things, which it would be highly arrogant in me to urge upon my brethren as matters of indispensable obligation to them. It may be wrong for me to eat meat, on account of my particular temperament, but have I a right to command all men, on the authority of Christ, to follow my example? Now what is

here asserted, is simply this: that the things which a church may command are precisely those which Christ has commanded. There may be, and there are, various other things which are left to the understanding and conscience of every individual, and of these he must judge for himself in the fear of God. But, what these are, and specially whether any particular thing which any man thinks to be his duty be right or wrong, wise or unwise, is not here considered. On this matter let every one judge for himself.

I say, let every one judge for himself; for in himself the right of judgment rests. Any and every member of a church, has a right to join, or not to join, any innocent voluntary association that he pleases; and, so long as it is innocent, much more if it be benevolent, it is the concern of no one individually, nor of the church collectively. His own choice is a sufficient and ultimate reason. For so doing the church has no right either to praise or to censure him, since the act is entirely out of the church's jurisdiction. And hence, such societies or associations, when formed, are a matter really and truly extraneous to the church. They are governed by their own laws. They form their own combinations. They accomplish their own purposes. They rise or fall, prosper or fail, and for none of this is the



church in any manner responsible, except in one respect. The church is responsible for the cultivation of piety in the hearts of its members. If through neglect of piety, benevolence, in any respect, languishes, for the neglect of piety the church is responsible to him who is her head. But she is responsible in no other respect.

So far as we have seen, then, every individual church is a voluntary association, subject to the laws which Christ has enacted, empowered by him to execute those laws, and no other, and under obligations to leave to the conscience of every member, precisely what Christ has left to his conscience. And a man, when he joins a church, submits himself to the laws of Christ, and to no other. He promises to obey his brethren so far as they enforce these laws, and no farther. In every other respect, he is as free from their jurisdiction, as he was before he united with them. But this in no manner fixes the limit of his duty. Because he is in other things without the jurisdiction of the church, he is by no means without the jurisdiction of the omniscient Savior. Because the church cannot censure him, it does not follow that Christ will not censure him. He who feels no other responsibility than that which is imposed upon him by the church, and excuses himself from every

duty which the church cannot enjoin, will surely at the last day, meet the chilling rebuke, "in vain do ye call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say." While, however, this is true, it is not to be forgotten that a man, when he joins a church, professes to understand the doctrines and precepts of Christ as that church understands them. Hence, so long as he is a member of that community, he is under obligation to act accordingly. If he change his opinions, or depart from their practices, he has no right to act as he chooses, and still continue a member.

A man who joins an Episcopal church, is bound to submit to Episcopal authority; or if he join a Presbyterian church, he is bound to submit to Presbyterian authority. He united himself voluntarily with those who thus believe, and, so long as he continue a member, he must abide by that choice, and fulfil the obligation which he has made. If he have changed his opinions, he must withdraw. He has no right, as an Episcopalian, to act as an Independent or as a Presbyterian. Let him unite himself to those, with whom he at present harmonizes.

Such is, as I suppose, the relation in which a church of Christ stands to its individual members. Let us proceed to inquire, what are the relations

in which any number of churches, each holding the same sentiments, stand to each other.

Inasmuch as they all stand in the same relation to Jesus Christ, their common legislator, they are all equal. No one has any right to assume any superiority over another. Nor is any one dependent on any other. Each contains, within itself, all the elements necessary to self existence. Each one is a perfect and complete system. The decisions of one are not binding on another. Each one is at liberty to interpret the laws of Christ for itself, and to govern itself according to that interpretation. Each church is therefore as essentially independent of every other, as though each one were the only church in christendom.

Hence, I do not see how a church, such as I have described, can, in propriety of speech, be *represented*. Representation always involves the idea, that the constituents have power to do some particular act, which, for the sake of convenience, they commission some other person to do for them. The original power to do the act; however, always vests in the constituent; and if he have no power to delegate, he can appoint no representative.

Now, what power has a church to delegate? All its power is derived from Christ. It may enforce the laws which he has enacted; but it has

a right neither to enact nor enforce any other. It cannot delegate to others the power of declaring what are his laws, nor of deciding whether or not they shall be obeyed.

I do not see how derived power can be delegated. We can delegate only the power which originates with ourselves; and, as nothing here is original, so nothing, so far as I see, can be transferred to another.

But it may be asked, though churches, as such, cannot be represented, yet, may not individual christians be represented? I answer, I do not see how *this* can be done. Every question which I decide as *a christian*, I decide on principles of duty to Christ. It is not a question either of wisdom, or of expediency, but a question of moral obligation. It is simply this: does or does not Christ require this of me? This question I must answer for myself, and no one else can answer it for me. I can never delegate it to any man, or to any association of men. Suppose the question to be, whether it be my duty *as a christian* to unite with any voluntary association; I must gather the answer to this question from what I can learn of the teachings of Christ. If other men can throw light upon these teachings, I receive it thankfully. But the *decision itself* must, after all, be made by myself. No one can make

it for me. I cannot leave such a question to the decision of a representative.

It would seem, then, that each christian church, as such, is incapable of representation. What is binding on each, is already fixed by Christ; what is not fixed, is left to the conscience of every individual. It may, however, be asked, what then is the bond which unites these different voluntary associations together? I answer, charity, which is the perfect bond. They are united to each other by the common bond of union to the same head, of love to the same Savior. They believe the same doctrines. They are cheered by the same hopes. They share in the same sympathies. They feel the same obligations. They encounter the same enemies; and are enlisted under the banner of the same Captain of their salvation. They are members of the same body, are animated by the same spirit; they all breathe the same breath of spiritual life, and hence, all being in the same manner affected by the same moral agencies, all their actions are, from the nature of the case, in harmony.

But, while this is the case, it does not follow that there may not be innocent means of imparting to this union a more practical efficiency, than could exist, were these separate associations ignorant of each other. Man is social, and there

are various and sound reasons why those who are united in spirit, should also have the means of knowing for themselves, and of manifesting to the world, that they are thus united. Hence, there is no valid objection to any voluntary organization, by which churches of the same belief and practice, may become acquainted with the fact of each other's existence, and unite together in cultivating in each other the graces of the christian character. The range of christian sympathy is thus enlarged, and the bonds of christian affection rendered stronger and more numerous.

All this is well. But it will be well no longer than whilst such associations are restricted within their proper limits. So soon as they assume to themselves the power of legislating over churches, and of controlling the opinions and consciences of individuals, by majorities, or by factitious public opinion, it will not be well. An irresponsible hierarchy will be created in the very bosom of independency. Associations of this kind are already sometimes used for party purposes; and attempts are even now sometimes made, for the purpose of pledging churches to courses of conduct, in favor of this or that movement of this moving age. All this is a violation of right. A church never invests its delegates to such assemblies with power to pledge it for *any thing*.

Nay, more ; these very matters in question are, as we have already shown, those with which the church has nothing at all to do. It behooves churches to look well to this subject, and from time to time to revert to the fundamental principles on which they are constituted, so that they may stand fast in the liberty, with which Christ has made them free.

The various churches which believe the same truths, and observe the same practices, when taken together, are frequently called in a more general sense a church, a sect, or a denomination. Thus we use the term when we say the Baptist, or the Congregational, or Episcopal church, or denomination. The nature of the relation which exists between the individual and this whole community of which he forms a constituent part, may, from what has been said, be easily seen. He has united himself to a particular church, by promising to obey it in all that Christ has commanded, and in nothing more. In every thing else, he is perfectly unpledged and uncommitted. An hundred thousand men have, in like manner, united themselves with particular churches, on the same general principle. All are bound to their particular churches, by the same ties, and this is all. All are united to each other by identity of belief and practice, in the things



which they all believe Christ to have commanded, and by nothing else. In every thing else, every one is as free as the air he breathes, free not only of his *particular* church, but also of the *whole* church or *denomination*. To the particular church with which he united, he is responsible, under Christ, for his belief and practice, but not to the denomination, nor to any one else. If he imbibe false doctrine, or, by his conduct, give evidence that the love of Christ is not in him, they may reprove him, or withdraw themselves from him. And here the matter ends. Each voluntary association is thus final within itself. The denomination can neither control nor overrule the decisions of a church, nor approve or censure a single individual. If a man stand faultless before *his church*, he is faultless before *his sect*. And for them to assume any authority over him or them, is gross and unblushing arrogance.

Hence, a denomination, as it is called, is a very different thing from what it is very currently supposed to be. It is not an association, into the common stock of which a man throws his conscience, his property, his character and opinions, to be used or abused, to be directed or controlled by the will of a majority. It is not a clan, of which every member is bound to espouse the quarrels of every other, and of which all the

members must rally at the call of him who claims to be their leader, or who volunteers to be their representative. There is no such clanship, for, except in those matters which Christ has enjoined, they are not in any respect committed to each other. There is no such representation, for there is no power to be delegated, and he who assumes it, and those who allow it to be assumed, act in direct variance with the first principles of independency.

I insist the more upon this, because, at the present time, there is great danger lest it should all be forgotten. Men, (from the very best motives, no doubt,) assume principles, the very reverse of what is here asserted, and what, I presume, every Independent believes. Thus, if a congregation in any place, see fit to build a meeting house three times as large and as expensive as they need, and plunge themselves hopelessly in debt, there is an universal cry for the *denomination* to come to the rescue. It is held that every member of a sect is dishonored, if these members of it are not enabled to pay a debt, which they incurred without any means of liquidation, and without consultation or advice with any thing but their own vanity; and it is held, at least by the agents in the case, that the whole estate, real and personal, of the whole sect, is

pledged to snatch this property from under the hammer ; that is, to present this congregation with a place of worship thrice as good as they need. Thus, also, if any scheme of benevolence, local or general, educational or religious, be set on foot, in any quarter of the land, if it originate with the members of a particular communion, and be stamped with the seal of the sect, it is held that every member of that sect is bound, right or wrong, wise or unwise, to uphold it. It matters not how wild may be its extravagance, or how doubtful its claim, if it have been set on foot by *the denomination*, and especially, if a majority can, by any fiction of representation, be made to seem in favor of it, every one must bow in submission to their decision, and go forth blindfold, to the work of carrying it forward. Nay, it has been held, practically at least, that members of a denomination might be praised or censured, for bowing or not bowing to such dictation. An assembly, purporting to be a representation of a religious sect of Independents, on one occasion at least, has agitated this question, and *entertained jurisdiction in such premises*, though I believe, the act was not eventually consummated. These facts show, that the essential principles of Independency are liable to be forgotten. It is therefore, time, that every one should know what are

his own rights, and what are the rights of his neighbor. It is proper that every one should be put in mind of the precise matters in which he subjects himself to his brethren, and, to some, at least, it may be refreshing to be informed, that, in all things else, he is accountable to *no being under God*. He can neither bind others, nor be bound by them. He can neither represent nor be represented. He cannot be made a slave by hand vote, nor be obliged to do any thing unless he have pledged himself to do it. And, in all this, there is no arrogance, no radicalism, no assumption of new and unheard of claims, but the calm, deliberate assertion of his rights as an Independent; and the man who would infringe these rights, and, either openly or covertly, beguile us of our liberty, and not he who asserts this, is the heretic and the schismatic.

While, however, I assert this as the right of an Independent, I would by no means push even a *right*, unkindly. If it be asked, as a matter of christian courtesy, that in this point or that, the right, for the sake of convenience, be waived, I would always, where no principle was at stake, waive it. But it must always be understood that the ground is *christian courtesy*, and not the concession of right. These are very different matters. St. Paul circumcised Timothy as a matter

of courtesy, and because he was willing to do an innocent thing for the sake of conciliating the feelings of his brethren. But, when they urged circumcision upon him as a matter of *obligation*, he most indignantly resisted, and would rather have gone to the stake, than have conceded the principle.

I have but one suggestion more. Suppose a denomination to be such as I have described. Its members have an undoubted right, whenever they choose, to form benevolent associations; and, unless they be dead to all christian charity, they will form very many of them. Those formed in each separate church, are, as we have seen, societies distinct from the church, out of whose members they are formed. The church is not bound by them, nor they by the church. The members of the church to which I belong, have formed domestic and foreign missionary societies, education societies, charitable societies, tract societies, and I know not how many others. But these societies have no control over the church. They do not represent it. They are associations entirely extraneous to it. A large part of the members of these societies are not members of the church; nay, they make no profession of discipleship to Christ. Every one sees that they have no more control over a church, and no more

right to represent it, than the stockholders of a bank, or the directors of an insurance company.

Suppose the various voluntary associations, formed, in the main, from the members of a particular denomination, be affiliated together, and send delegates to a general meeting, or convention or association, this meeting, by whatsoever name it be called, cannot *represent the denomination*. Their *constituents* did not represent the individual churches to which some of them belonged, and they *surely* cannot any more represent the whole of the churches, that is, the whole denomination. The societies which they represent, were a thing *extraneous* to the individual *churches*, and all of them together, are a thing extraneous to *the whole church*. They represent and bind the societies who send them, and who consented to be bound by them, but they represent and they bind no one else. To attempt to do so, either directly or indirectly, is gross usurpation.

This seems to me evident, upon inspection. The societies by whom they are sent, may or may not be disciples of Christ; and if the act of these delegates could bind the church, then would the disciple of Christ be bound, not by the will of his *master* or even of his *brethren*, but by the will of the world. This would be the very worst form of subjection of the church to the state.

Besides, if *one* benevolent society has the power to represent and bind the church, by its delegates, then, *every* benevolent society has the same power. The foreign missionary society, the education society, the domestic missionary society, the bible society, the abolition society, the peace society, and I know not how many others, all have this power; and the votes of a majority of the delegates of such societies are binding upon the church, and upon the whole church. Every vote of each one, how much soever it may conflict with all the rest, is equally binding upon every member of a sect. And thus, the church exchanges the simple, mild and holy law of Christ, for the arbitrary domination of a multitude of Egyptian taskmasters.

In answer to this, it will not avail to tell us, that these are our *brethren*, and that they will not use this power unkindly. The question is not how they will *use it*, but do they *possess it*? I cannot transfer the allegiance which I owe to Christ, to my brother, any more than to any other man. The man who calls himself my brother, should give me some better proof of his brotherly kindness, than trampling upon my rights. That he is my brother, is a reason why he should treat me kindly, or at least respect my rights, and not why he should infringe them. If the *first* evi-



dence of fraternal regard consists in the violation of my liberty, what the *last* will be, it is somewhat difficult to conjecture.

I might allude to recent instances, which painfully illustrate the importance of bearing in mind the principles which I have endeavored to illustrate. But I will not do it. I seek to bring no man into reproach. I impeach not the motives of any man; but I must claim the privilege of examining principles, and of giving my reasons for believing or not believing any assumed principles to be erroneous.

In conclusion, then, let me remark, that an Independent church is incapable of representation, from the essential elements of its constitution. Each individual church claims the right, and the exclusive right, of administering the laws of Christ to its constituent members; and the act of this church in the premises is final. Let these churches be multiplied as they may, each one is precisely the same as if it stood alone, complete and perfect within itself, *totus teres ac rotundus*. The members of any such church, have a right to form themselves into as many innocent societies as they please; but these societies are all extraneous to each individual church, independent of it, and it is independent of them. They may be affiliated together, and be represented in

general conclave, but they are still extraneous to the *whole* church, as the societies which they represent are extraneous to the *particular parts* of it. It is independent of them, and they are independent of it. The denomination remains as it was before, free as air, unfettered and unbound by aught save the word of the living God.

Such do I suppose to be the principles of Independency. Whether this be the best form of church government, I pretend not here to assert, for this is not the place for the argument. I will however assert, that I do most decidedly prefer it. I urge it, however, upon no one. I delight to see every man choosing that form of ecclesiastical association which pleases him. But I may without offence ask every Independent to understand and to maintain his principles. In maintaining them, our fathers suffered bonds, confiscation, banishment and death. Let us not be unmindful of the heritage which they have left us. Let us stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and not be entangled again with any yoke of bondage.

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## SECTION EIGHTH.

## OF OFFICIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

The principles concerned in the discussion of this branch of the subject have already been explained. We propose, in the present section, to carry it out into a few additional illustrations.

The fact has been already alluded to, that the creation of any office involves the delegation of some power; and the appointment to an office, is the conferring of this power upon some individual. But *all* power is not given to any one whatever; of course, the responsibility of an officer is limited by the *extent* of the power conferred upon him. Again, power is never given to any one, except for some *purpose*. For that purpose, and for no other, is he allowed, of right, to use it. The other limitation, therefore, to his responsibility is the *purpose* for which it was conferred. All official responsibility is, therefore, subject to these two limitations: *first*, the *extent* of the power conferred, and *secondly*, the *purpose* for which it was conferred. Up to this limitation every officer is responsible—beyond it, his responsibility ceases.

This, for instance, is the case with civil officers. The creation of executive, legislative and judicial

offices, is necessary to the existence of society. One party is authorized to make laws, another to administer justice under them, and a third to put them into execution. Each party is responsible to society, for the discharge of precisely those duties which have been assigned to it. To each one is committed the power, necessary for the due discharge of that particular duty. No power, except that committed, may be used, nor may the power committed be used for any other purpose than that for which it was delegated. He who exceeds the power given him is guilty of usurpation. He who uses it for purposes for which it was not given, is guilty of abuse of power.

All this is very plain, but it is not always remembered. A very plausible notion frequently obtains, that a civil officer may be responsible for the *whole* good of the *whole* country. Hence, he feels authorized sometimes to exceed the limits of his power, and sometimes to violate the purpose for which it was given, for the sake of promoting this general good. And, as the greatest good which a partisan can perceive, is the success of his own party, there is always danger, in popular governments, of great invasion of right, from this species of obliquity.

But, it is very evident, that the principle on

which this conduct is justified, is wholly erroneous. No man is responsible for the *whole* good of the *whole*, but only for so much of it as has, in fact, been committed to him. To the legislator, the judge, the executive officer, a particular duty has been assigned ; and the whole responsibility resting upon each, is to discharge in singleness of heart precisely the duty appertaining to his office. If what he esteems a good object, cannot be attained by pursuing precisely this course of conduct, he is not responsible for the result. That love of country may well be suspected, which impels a man to trample upon obligation, and violate trust. When the late John Jay was Governor of the State of New York, he had it in his power, by calling an extra session of the Legislature, to alter the mode of choosing electors of President of the United States, and thus to ensure the election of the candidate whom he preferred, and defeat the election of one whose elevation to the presidency he believed would be fraught with great evils to the country. He was strongly urged to adopt this course, by those in whom he was accustomed to confide, his personal and his political friends, men of high honor and tried patriotism. *But he utterly refused.* His moral perceptions were far too clear to be beclouded by any such sophistry.

He never could be made to believe that, in ever so important a crisis, the end justifies the means. He knew that the power of calling an extra session was placed in his hands. But he *also* knew that it was given him for purposes connected with the *State*, and not with the *United States*; and, more than this, that it was never given him to be used as an instrument for the promotion of his own political sentiments, whether right or wrong. He allowed the election to take its natural course, and the power of his friends was prostrated forever. It was a noble act, and worthy of John Jay. It was one of those deeds which mark a man for immortality. It was incomparably more glorious than a thousand political triumphs. A thousand political triumphs are as nothing to it.

Now the same principle applies to another case in which a power which clearly exists, is, by common consent, very frequently abused. I refer to the power of removal from office. It is manifest that this power must exist somewhere, otherwise an officer, appointed for a definite period, might defraud the public during his whole continuance in office, and there would be no remedy. He might prove ever so shamefully incompetent, yet the nuisance could not be abated. To avoid this evil, the power of removal from

office, in a great variety of cases, is left with the executive departments of Government, and is so left, wisely. But it is always to be remembered that it is left for this purpose only, to save the public from harm arising from the incompetency or the vice of the office holder. It was never given to the executive for the purpose of enabling it to crush one party, or to elevate another, to reward its friends or to punish its enemies. He who uses it in this manner, violates the spirit of the Constitution, and seems to me guilty of a moral wrong. The Treasurer of the United States has control over its funds for a particular and definite purpose. If he use this power for the sake of bribery, every one sees that this would be an enormous crime. But, I do not see that the principles in the two cases are different. In both instances, money is the ultimate matter in dispute. I do not see that an officer has any more right in the one case, than in the other, to use his power, for purposes different from those for which it was committed to him.

I have alluded to the subject of political proscription, in another connection. I recur to it again, not because I consider political office, in any respect, a desirable boon. Far from it. I speak of it, because of the demoralizing effect which must be produced, in any community,



where elections are so frequent, by holding up before men the motive of sordid self-interest, in the place of the proper motive which should influence every patriotic citizen. The standard of public virtue is thus depressed, and a base subserviency to popular clamor is engendered, of which a free people would do well to be deeply ashamed.

And here, I would remark in passing, that I think we are in danger, in this country, of using the right of suffrage for purposes for which it was never intended. The people, in every free government, claim the right of choosing their own magistrates, but they claim that right for a specific purpose. They claim it because they wish to secure to themselves the power of choosing men who will make just and equitable laws, who will interpret these laws faithfully and impartially, and administer them without either fear, favor or affection. Every question which affects these interests of civil society, may fairly and honestly be brought to the ballot box. But I do not see that every question ought to be brought there. The ballot box can never be *rightfully* used to promote my own religious views, or to advance the interests of my favorite association. Yet, on almost every occasion in which masses of men are leagued together, for any purpose what-

ever, the cry is instantly raised, "to the ballot box!" "to the ballot box!!" This surely is using a power which rightfully exists, for a purpose for which it was never conferred. It seems to me that the purposes of civil society would be better attained by using our civil rights always within their proper limits, and by promoting our own views, by such means as are unquestionably innocent; at least, by such means as will not put in jeopardy the very advantages which we derive from civil liberty itself.

Another case, illustrative of the same principle, may be taken from the office of ministers of the gospel. They are appointed to teach men their duty, and to persuade them to practise it. To their duty and responsibility, there are, however, limitations, which it may be worth while, in this place, briefly to notice.

I have already treated of the nature and responsibility of a christian church. I have endeavored to show that it was a voluntary association of persons who are already disciples of Christ, and who have bound themselves to obey his laws. In associating together as a christian church, they mutually submit themselves to each other, in respect to every thing which Christ has commanded. The laws of Christ, they are thus, by mutual consent, authorized to enjoin upon

each other ; and they are at liberty, nay, they are obliged to withdraw themselves from every brother who walketh disorderly. What Christ has left optional, is still left optional, and in respect to it, every member is as much at liberty as he was before.

Now, the business of the minister of Christ is, as I suppose, to carry forward the purpose for which the church was constituted. Hence, he is called both the servant of the church, and the servant of Christ. He is appointed to inculcate upon his brethren the temper of mind which Christ inculcated. He is bound; also, to exhort them to the practice of those duties, which Christ has enjoined ; and to warn them against those acts which Christ has forbidden. In doing this, he utters the words of Christ, and he speaks with the authority of Christ. He may enforce every such exhortation with the words of the apostle, thus hath the Lord commanded. And, he may assure his hearers of the solemn judgments which the bible has denounced, in case they refuse to obey. In all this, he speaks as an ambassador of Christ, as though God did beseech men by him ; and for all his instructions, within this limit, his hearers must give account at the judgment day, as if Christ himself had spoken these very words, and uttered these very commands.

But, inasmuch as the consequences attending upon the preaching of the gospel are so immeasurably solemn, it is of the highest importance that the minister of Christ be careful as an ambassador of Christ, to proclaim under these sanctions, nothing but what Christ has *commanded*. The minister of Christ may not denounce the judgments of God against any thing, against which Christ himself has not denounced them. What Christ has left to the understanding and conscience of the individual, that he must leave to these. What Christ has revealed *obscurely*, he must reveal obscurely. What Christ has enforced as a matter of general obligation, that, he may thus enforce. What Christ has made a matter of *particular* obligation, that he must make as Christ himself has made it.

We see, then, what is the limit of a minister's official duty. The tempers of mind which Christ has enjoined, he may enjoin. The acts which Christ has specified, as indicative of those tempers of mind, he may specify. All this, he may do under the authority of Christ. But when Christ has merely enjoined the temper of mind, and has not specified the manner of its exemplification, then the minister may, on the authority of Christ, enjoin the temper of mind, but he must leave the exemplification to the conscience of the indi-

vidual. This latter, he is not permitted to do as a minister of Christ. He may entertain his opinion, the same as other men, and act accordingly. He may do, in this respect, as he pleases, and he must leave every one else to do the same. He is not responsible for the result, nor was it ever intended that he should be.

Thus, from some doctrine clearly revealed, he may infer some other doctrine. This inference may bind him, but it does not bind any one else. He cannot urge it as a matter of *revealed* truth. It is not what Christ *has said*, but is only the inference of a fallible man, from what Christ has said. Thus also of a practical duty. He may urge, on the authority of Christ, the duty of engaging in the work of evangelizing the world, but he cannot urge upon any one, on that authority, the duty of joining *this* or *that* voluntary association. Of the manner of obeying this command of Christ, every one must judge for himself. He may urge upon every one the duty of temperance, and do it on the authority of Christ, but he cannot urge, on the same authority, the joining any *particular* temperance society. He may preach upon the duty of purity in thought, and mind and action, and urge it by all the solemnities of the coming judgment ; but he cannot thus urge the belonging to any particular society

for the promotion of purity. The apostle Paul himself was extremely careful to discriminate between what he delivered as *from the Lord*, and what he delivered as *from himself*. The one was binding on the conscience, because the Lord had said it ; the other was merely the counsel of a friend, which every one was at perfect liberty to follow or not to follow, as he himself thought best.

The same remarks apply, in substance, to the relation between a clergyman and his *congregation* ; that is, that assembly which includes the church and all those who unite with them in supporting the institutions of religion. The contract between the minister and this association is subordinate to that between him and the church. It acknowledges the latter as its basis. A church having chosen a pastor to labor for their improvement, in the manner, and under the conditions, above stated, other persons desiring to be thus instructed, and believing the same doctrines, or at least consenting to them, unite with the members of the church in a common association for carrying this object into effect. With this design, they unite their contributions for the purpose of erecting a house of worship, and of providing for the support of their religious teacher. But, inasmuch as this association acknowledges

as its basis the relation between the pastor and the church, it is to be interpreted in the same manner. So long as the pastor confines himself within the limits marked out by his commission, they are bound to hold him harmless. They have chosen him to preach to them the commands of Christ. He has vowed to God, and promised to them, that he will do it. If they reject his message, while he thus delivers it, they reject not *him*, but the *Lord*. And, on the other hand, they have a right to demand that he do not transcend those limits, because he has not been commissioned by God to preach any thing else, and they have not engaged to hear any thing else, if he preach it.

All this, however, affects nothing but a minister's *official* character. He has precisely the same rights as any other man to join any innocent association of which he approves, and to promote its object by any such innocent measures as he thinks proper. His example, in such a case, will, of course, be likely to have weight with his people, and to incline many of them to follow it. But this is a mere accidental advantage which the cause that he espouses derives, from the power which it possesses of commending itself to the wise and the good. To this there can be, and there ought to be, no objection.



While, in his *official* character, a minister is limited within the range of his official duty ; out of that *limit*, he is as free as any other man. He may fearlessly and boldly assert his independence, and the people that would desire to control him in these respects, infringes his rights, and exhibits a willingness to trifle with his personal liberty.

Such do I suppose to be the nature of the relation between a christian minister and his church and congregation, when considered as a matter of *right*. Still, as I have said before, right itself may be insisted on unkindly. Allowance is always to be made for the weakness of human nature, and a still greater allowance for that warmth of benevolence which will sometimes hurry a man beyond the precise limits of duty. In many points, also, a whole congregation are *agreed* in wishing a clergyman to discuss certain topics which do not strictly appertain to his office. In this case, since all are agreed, there can be no question respecting right, so far as *he* and *they* are concerned ; the only question that could arise, would be between *him* and his *master*. But, when once a difficulty arises, and the parties are *divided*, the question must be decided on the principles of *right*. He may plead against *their* wishes that he does not choose to

go beyond his official duties. They may plead, in opposition to his wishes, that they do not desire to hear him on any subject which lies beyond that limit. Or, if a congregation be divided among themselves, the one party desiring him to preach, and the other desiring him to abstain from preaching, on a particular subject, the question is to be decided by determining whether that subject comes within the limit of his official duty as an ambassador of Christ. If it do, he may preach about it whenever he thinks it will be useful. If it be not, any one of the society ought to be heard, when he pleads his right to exclude such subject from the services of the sanctuary.

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## SECTION NINTH.

### THE SLAVERY QUESTION.

It may be proper, at the commencement of this section, to state, that I propose to enter into no consideration of the moral bearings of the institution of domestic slavery. My views upon this subject, I have already given in another place.\* Were it otherwise, I should have no occasion here to examine the question in this point of view.

\* Elements of Moral Science. Section on violation of personal liberty.

With these topics the present discussion has nothing to do. Granting all that may be said of the moral evil of this institution, granting it to be a violation of the law under which God has constituted moral beings, the question still remains to be decided, what is our duty in respect to it; and, what are the limitations, within which our efforts for its removal are to be restricted? In every other case, we readily perceive that these questions are different and dissimilar. Whether or not a particular act be wrong, is one question. In what *manner* it be proper to remove or arrest the evil, is certainly another and very different question. And it is evident that the considerations which would bear upon the one, would have no bearing whatever upon the other. Whether murder be or be not a crime, must be shown from the temper of heart which it indicates, and from the results, to which, if unpunished, it would lead. But these arguments would be entirely out of place, if they were urged to show that a murderer should be punished without trial, and that every man is at liberty to knock him on the head, wherever and whenever he may meet him.

The right or wrong, the innocence or guilt of slavery, is not the question here to be discussed. Waiving this, and granting it to be a violation of the law which God has ordained between man and man, and granting, also, that it is our duty to

labor for its removal, I design merely to inquire what are the limits, within which our efforts, for the accomplishment of this purpose, are to be restricted.

Our duty on this subject, must, I think, be either as *citizens* of the United States ; or as *human beings*, under law to God.

1. I think it evident, that, as *citizens of the United States*, we have no power whatever either to abolish slavery in the southern States ; or to do any thing, of which the direct intention is to abolish it. Whatever power we possess, as citizens of the United States, is conferred upon us by the constitution. This power is *not conferred upon us* by that instrument, and therefore *it does not exist*.

But this instrument has not merely a *positive*, it has also a *negative* power. It not only *grants* certain powers, but it expressly declares that those not enumerated are *not granted*. Thus, it enacts, that all "The powers not delegated to the United States by the constitution, nor prohibited by it, to the States, *are reserved* to the States, respectively, or to the people." Now, the abolition of slavery being a power *not conferred*, it is, by this article, expressly *withheld*. Whatever power we may therefore have over slavery, as *citizens of the several States*, within our own limits respectively, we have none, as *citizens of*

*the United States.* The majority of the people in the United States, have, in this respect, no power over the minority; for, the minority has never conceded to them this power. Should all the States in the Union but one, and that one the very smallest, abolish slavery; should the majority of one hundred to one, of the people of the United States, be in favor of its abolition, still it would not alter the case. That one State, would be as free to abolish it or not to abolish it, as it is now. This is a question which has never been submitted to the majority of the citizens of these United States, and, therefore, the citizens of the United States, as citizens, have nothing to do with it.

The same thing is evident, from the most cursory view of the circumstances under which the constitution was formed. Previously to the revolution, each of these States was an independent colony; constituted into a distinct government, by charter from the British crown. Each colony was a government as distinct from every other, as though it had been a thousand miles distant from all the rest; as *distinct*, in fact, as are the different West India Islands from each other, or as any one of the West India Islands, from the colony of Canada, of New Zealand, or of Bombay. They all held of the British crown, but were all independent of each other, and the only bond of

union by which they were connected together, was, that they were all subject to the same king, and all acknowledged the ultimate authority of the constitutional laws of the empire.

When the independence of these colonies was established, this link, which bound each of them to the mother country, and thus indirectly to each other, was severed. They became independent States, having, each one for itself, power to make peace or war, or to form alliances, offensive and defensive, with what foreign States soever they severally chose. While in this condition, it is manifest that no State had any power *whatever* over any other State. Any one might have established slavery, or have abolished it, and no other one would have imagined that, in so doing, it was liable to any control from any other, or from all the rest; any more than from Canada, Austria, Russia, or the Sandwich Islands.

Under these circumstances they chose, of their own sovereign will, to form a confederate government. In the formation of this government, each State, or the people of each State, mutually agreed to commit certain powers to the whole, and to submit the ultimate decision of certain questions to the majority of the whole people represented by their Senators and Representatives in Congress. What they have thus submitted to the decision of the majority, and *noth-*

*ing else*, can be decided by the majority. What has not been submitted, remains precisely as it was before, in the power of the citizens of the several States; and the citizens of the United States have no more to do with it, than they have with the affairs of Iceland.

The principle, in this case, is the same as that which governs partnerships. If twenty men put into common stock, each a thousand dollars, on condition that the whole, for *certain purposes*, shall be controlled by a majority of the proprietors, or of such persons as they may appoint, then the majority has a conceded right to control *that* property for *those purposes*. But that is *all* their power. They have no control over another dollar of the property of any proprietor, nor have they a right to control it for any other *purposes* than those for which it was contributed. Still less have they a right to control the political opinions of a proprietor, or to direct in what manner he shall educate his children, or govern his family. The principle in both cases is the same, and it is a very obvious one. It is simply this. No man is bound by any compact, any further than he has bound himself. In forming any society, there are, of necessity, certain individual rights, which a man submits to the decision of the majority. But the surrender of these, involves the surrender of no other, and, in every



thing else, he is as perfectly independent of the power of the majority as he was before.

As we have, therefore, as citizens, no power over this subject, we have, as citizens, no responsibility. The guilt, if guilt exists, will not rest upon us as citizens of the United States. Who ever supposes himself guilty, because Congress does not *pass a law* abolishing slavery in the United States? But this is the only manner in which, as citizens of the United States, we have any power to act in this, or in any other case. If, then, we are not responsible, we have, as *citizens*, no obligation to discharge in the premises. Whether slavery be bad or good, we wash our hands of it, inasmuch as it is a matter which the providence of God has never placed within our jurisdiction.

But this is not quite all. As citizens of the United States, we have solemnly promised to *let it alone*. We have declared that we *leave* to the States respectively, and to the people of the States, whatever powers they have not conceded to us. This is, by universal consent, acknowledged to be one of the powers thus left. We have, therefore, promised as citizens of the United States, to let *this* alone. The concession has been made by both parties, and we hold the other party to it. Should the majority in Congress undertake to *establish* slavery, in one of the

free States, we should plead *this very article*, as a bar to their usurpation. But, the slave-holding States have precisely the same right to plead it against *us*, should we attempt any legislation in the case. Both parties have pledged themselves to abstain, and neither can interfere in the matter, without the violation of a solemn compact. In this respect, therefore, the Providence of God, and our own solemn obligations to each other, have precluded any action whatever.

But I go still further. I hold that a *compact* is binding, in its *spirit* as well as in its *letter*. The *spirit* of the compact, I suppose, imposes upon me the obligation not to do any thing for the purpose of changing the relation of master and slave, except with the consent of the master. I have no right to declare the abolition of slavery in another State; I have conceded that this is to be left to the *free choice* of the citizens of that State. I have no right to do any thing to *interfere* with that *free choice*. I have, therefore, no right to excite such a state of feeling among the slaves, that the master shall be *obliged*, from physical necessity, to liberate his slaves, whether he believes it to be right and wise, or whether he believes the contrary. This is as much a violation of the *spirit* of the compact, as an arbitrary act of legislation. The compact concedes, that it is to be left to the *free will* of

the States, and I oblige them to act in accordance with *my* will, and not in accordance with their own. This is a violation of clear and solemn obligation. I have no control over the manner in which my neighbor shall educate his children ; and to interfere by physical force, in order to oblige him to educate them as I please, would be infamous. But if I stir up such a feeling in his family, that he is obliged to follow my suggestions, in order to save himself from being poisoned, I am equally infamous. The violation of right is as great in the one case as in the other. If a question has been left to my decision, I claim the privilege of deciding it for myself, and I thank no one for deciding it for me ; much less do I thank him for taking the decision out of my hands, and settling it by physical force. And it matters nothing to me, whether this physical force be exerted by my neighbor *himself*, or whether he stir up another man to exert it. In both cases, it is a palpable and insolent violation of right.

But it may be said, granting all this, yet Congress *has* a right to abolish slavery in the *District of Columbia*. Here we are, therefore, *responsible*, and of course, *under obligation*. Let us proceed and calmly examine this question.

I grant that the unrestricted legislative control over the District of Columbia, has been ceded to

the United States. I grant that Congress has the same power over the District, as the Legislatures of the several States have over their own States respectively. They have, therefore, the *power* to abolish slavery within that District.

Nay, I am willing to go farther. I am willing to allow that Congress has a *right* to abolish slavery in the District. By right, I mean that they have the *power*, and that *no legal obstacle* exists to the exercise of that power. There is nothing in the *Constitution* to forbid it. There is nothing in the *act of cession* to forbid it. There is nothing in the constitution and laws of the States which does, or which can forbid it. The cession to Congress was absolute and unrestricted. On these points, I am disposed to raise no question whatever.

But it is always to be remembered, that it is *one* thing to say that a man has a *right* to do a particular act, and a very *different thing* to say that it *is right* and just for him to do that particular act. The *right* to do the act may be absolute, but the fitness, and propriety and justice of *exercising* that right, may be *conditional*. A man has a right to exact the personal labor of his wife, and also of his children during their minority, that is, he may do it, and there is no law to prevent it; nay, in doing it, the law will protect him from interference. But the *justice* of

his *exercising* this right is certainly conditional. He may do it justly, if it be necessary for their common support. But, it surely would be an atrocious violation of justice, if he should live in indolence and splendor, and demand that they should thus labor to maintain him. Yet, if he should do this, he might plead that he had a right to do thus, and nobody could gainsay it. A father has a *right* to turn his children out of his house when they become of age, and it may, under some circumstances, be exercised with propriety ; but this by no means proves that it would be *right* for parents always to do so. A parent, worth an independent fortune, has a *right* to bind out his child as an apprentice, to the most loathsome and degrading occupation ; but is this a right which it is fit, and proper, and just, at all times, to exercise ?

It is manifest, then, that, granting a right to exist, in the signification above given, the question still remains, is it a right, fit and proper and just to be *exercised* ? In other words, although we have the *right* to do it, yet would it be right and just for us to do it ? This is really the point on which it seems to me the whole question hinges.

I ask, then, in the first place, what is the *object* of the act of abolition ? Is it ultimate within itself ? Is it merely because, as citizens of the United

States, we are opposed to slavery in any territory over which we exercise jurisdiction? Or, is it for the sake of something ulterior, that is, for the sake of creating such a state of things in the slave-holding States, that the citizens of those States will be obliged, whether they approve of it or not, to abolish slavery? In so far as this latter is the object, I think it unconstitutional; because, we have, by the spirit of the compact, bound ourselves to leave it to their own *free will*. That free will, we have no right, either by ourselves or by others, to control; and we have no right to use our power, either of one kind or another, for this purpose. I think, therefore, we have no right to exercise the power which we possess for the accomplishment of this object.

I ask, in the next place, was the power over the District of Columbia ceded to Congress, *for this purpose*? Did Maryland and Virginia ever anticipate, that, without their consent, this use would be made of it? Did the southern States generally, when they became parties to this contract, suppose that this power would be claimed and used by Congress? I think that all these questions must be answered in the negative. If so, the right has not, in fact, been unconditionally given. It is a thing *out of the contract*, so far as the *animus* of both parties was concerned. If it be so, although it may be granted

by the *letter*, it is not granted by the *spirit* of the instrument, and the right cannot, without the consent of the other party, be justly and honorably exercised. If I make a contract with my neighbor, and by the *letter* of that contract, obtain a power to do some act, which power he never intended to convey, I cannot, as an honorable man, avail myself of it. To do so, is an act of knavery, and every man of sound principles would so consider it.

Now, if it be so, it matters not what may be the *purpose*, for the sake of which we propose to take an unfair advantage. I have no more right to impose upon my neighbor, when I intend to use the proceeds of my trickery for purposes of benevolence, than when I intend to use them for the purpose of usury. The real question is, is it right for me to interpret the contract in this manner? If it be, I may so interpret it, let me do what I will with the gain. If it be not right, I may not so interpret it, let my intention be what it may, in regard to the proceeds.

That it would not be right for us thus to interpret the contract, I think may be clearly shown by the results of an extension of the principle contended for. It must be granted, that the power to *abolish* and the power to *establish*, are the same. Now, Congress possesses precisely the same power over navy yards, fortifications, ar-



senals, &c., belonging to the General Government, that it possesses over the District of Columbia. Many of these have been ceded to the United States, by the free States, and are still embosomed within them. Congress has precisely the same right to abolish or to establish slavery in all these, as it has to abolish or to establish it in the District. But would it be a just, fit and proper exercise of this right, were Congress to *establish* slavery in all these little portions of territory? Were such a thing attempted, I ask any candid man, whether we should not, at once, exclaim that *this power was never conferred for this purpose*; and that the contract could not be thus interpreted, without overreaching and trickery? Now, I do not see that any principle is involved in the one case, that is not involved in the other. I say, therefore, that, although the power is conferred by the *letter* of the contract, it is not conferred by the *spirit*; and, therefore, we cannot use it *honorably*; that is, we cannot use it *at all*.

But if the right to use this power be contingent, it may be asked, when will the contingency arise, in which we can rightfully use it? I answer, it may arise in several ways. First, whenever the southern States *agree to it*, it will be proper to use it. Secondly, whenever Maryland and Virginia, or either of them, shall abolish slavery, it will, I think, be perfectly right to use

it. The history of slavery, in this country, shows, that the line of demarcation between slave and free labor, has an irresistible tendency to move southward. Right has a natural power over wrong, and the advantages which it confers on all parties, tend, of themselves, to extend its boundaries. Maryland, but for untoward reasons, to which I will not here allude, would, by this time, I believe, have nearly freed herself from the evils of slavery. There can be no reason why Congress should oppose *any obstacle* to the *natural course of events*, in respect to this or any other change of opinion. Whenever the District would have become free, if it had remained a part of the States, by which it was originally ceded, then it will be not only the right, but the duty of Congress, to abolish slavery. Then we can abolish it without any infringement of right, and then, the whole country, both north and south, must rejoice in the act.

While I hold these opinions, however, I beg leave to remark, that I entertain no light conceptions of the evil of slavery in general, or of the evil of slavery in the District of Columbia in particular. I would not own a slave, "for all the gold that sinews bought and sold, have ever earned." My blood has curdled, as I have heard the atrocious wrongs committed in the very District itself, under the eyes of calm, uncom-

mitted persons, who have related them to me. I never have seen them myself, for I have never been in Washington. I have "felt a stain like a wound," when foreigners have taunted me with the fact, that the seat of government of this free people is the great slave market for the country. But deep and degrading as is that stain, I will bear it with patience, rather than wipe it off by an act of injustice, treachery or dishonor. And more than this, were I a southern, as I am a northern man, I never could consent, as a man of honor, to hold my fellow citizens committed to a system, which, whether truly or falsely, they feel to be a national disgrace. In that spirit of frankness and disinterestedness, which always has marked the southern character, I would say, "We prefer this system, and we are willing to bear the reproach of it. We receive benefit, and we believe innocent benefit, from it. But you have no interest in it, and we will not expose you to reproach, nor hold you to this contract, since it is repugnant to your moral sentiments." Were I a southern as I am a northern man, I would myself *propose* the abolition of slavery in the District. It is but a small matter in itself, but it is an act, which could only emanate from a noble and patriotic spirit.

And were the subject presented in this light, I do believe that the South is equal to the occasion.

I know their chivalric contempt of danger. I know their enthusiastic attachment to personal right. I know, also, their ardent love of country, and that it is, with them, a point of honor to be *foremost* in making any sacrifice for the public good. If their rights on this subject were freely conceded, and the question put upon its true ground, the ground of concession to the honest, although they may think it the misguided, moral feeling of the north, I cannot believe that they would hesitate to follow the dictates of an enlarged and disinterested patriotism. When two courses of conduct are before them, I believe them fully capable of appreciating the dignity of choosing the more noble. It is not natural to them gratuitously to inflict pain upon an associate, specially upon a fellow citizen. This is a pain which need not be inflicted. I am sure the noblest course that could be taken, would be, for them magnanimously to offer to bid it cease forever.

I appeal, therefore, and I do it with confidence, to the patriotism of the South. I declare that, as a citizen of the United States, I am grieved that the soil in which I have with them a common right of ownership, should have become an universal slave market; that that soil should be polluted with prisons, constructed for the express purpose of collecting together human beings for exporta-

tion ; and that a regular line of slave ships should sail from the harbors of the District. I have never had any thing to do with slavery. I derive no benefit from it, yet I am obliged to bear the pain of being a party to what, in my conscience, I disapprove. Yet, while I thus declare myself deeply grieved, I will respect the rights of the South to the very last tittle, in letter and in spirit. I will bear it all unto the very end, rather than violate, either in form, or in fact, the pledge which I have solemnly given. But, while I thus respect the *rights* of my southern brethren, I surely may ask, that they respect my *feelings*, in return. The action in this case must come from them. I therefore call upon them, to come forward, with the nobleness of which I know them to be capable, and of their own accord, remove this cause of grief. I say nothing of consequences, for be these what they may, they as well as I, can look them calmly in the face. I ask them to make this offering on the altar of frank, generous, fraternal patriotism. It will be a sacrifice honorable in the eyes of men, and well pleasing in the sight of God. And here, for myself, and I believe I may also do it in behalf of all the true friends of man at the North, I solemnly promise, that, when it shall be our turn to make a similar offering, we will not be outdone by them, when they have done their uttermost.

A few words more, and I have done with this part of the subject. There seems to me a dangerous disposition on both sides, wherever the question of slavery is agitated, to press upon the limits of the constitution to the utmost. At the North, I have no doubt, that the subject of slavery has been discussed in a manner decidedly at variance with constitutional liberty of speech and of the press. On the other hand, at the South, it has been held, that the discussion of this subject, in all *manners*, and in any *spirit*, was to be *forbidden*. The right of petition has, I doubt not, been abused ; topics have been introduced into petitions which have no constitutional right to be introduced, and petitions have been multiplied, for the sake of effect, in such numbers as to threaten to exclude every other subject of discussion. On the other hand, this has been met by measures, which seem to me at variance with the very existence of the right of petition. Every one must see that wrong on one side, is no justification of wrong on the other. Passion is never decorous ; least of all, in legislators. Patience and forbearance, calm adherence to right, will in the end come off the most successfully. There is surely no greater wisdom, in controversy, than to hold an opponent always in the wrong.

And lastly, as it respects the annexation of Texas. That the annexation of Texas will ex-

tend the system of slavery, I presume there can be no doubt, nor can there be any doubt, that, by so doing, it will alter materially the balance which exists, between the slave holding and the free States. Yet this is not an argument which I would use, as an *American citizen*, because slavery, in the view of the constitution, is innocent; and the system has a right to whatever *accidental* advantages may, from the pursuit of the honest and wise policy of the country, accrue to it. On the other hand, as this is strictly a *local* institution, I do not see how *honorable* men can urge a *national* measure *for this reason*. The same principle which precludes the North from *opposing* it, also, as it seems to me, precludes the South from *urging* it. It should, therefore, be decided on general principles of statesmanship.

If it be left to these reasons, it seems to me that there can be but little room for argument. We want not *territory*, since we have, already, more than we need. We need not additional *strength*, and if we did, the annexation of Texas could not give it to us. There is no reason that I can conceive for it, and there are strong constitutional objections against it. The South has always contended *strongly*, and I think *truly*, against the use of *doubtful* constitutional powers. The *best* that can be said on this subject, is, that the constitutional *right* to do the act, is *extremely*



*doubtful.* Let the South then be true to the construction for which she has always contended; and let her manifest her fidelity to her principles, by holding fast to them, even when they seem adverse to her interest. This is the only way in which we can truly increase the practical power of the constitution. Just in proportion as this is strengthened, we shall be united, happy and invincible.

II. We have now cleared our way through the question, in so far as it concerns our duty as *citizens*. It only remains that we consider our duty in respect to slavery, arising from our relations as men.

When we look upon it in this view, we are to consider it, in general, just as we should consider slavery in the West Indies, or in South America, or in any other part of the world. The principal, if not the only difference, is, that it is an evil existing in our own neighborhood, and a wrong done by our friends and acquaintances; by men who would be more likely to hear argument and motive from *us*, than from any one else; and, therefore, for these reasons, we are specially called upon to attempt its removal.

In this, as in any case, therefore, we are under the common obligation to make known to our fellow men, that truth which we believe to be conducive to their happiness, and to the happiness

of men in general. Inasmuch as this is a question of practical duty, our appeal is to be made to the understanding and conscience of those whom we desire to convince. Inasmuch as the only reason which renders it obligatory on us to endeavor to convince them, is the general obligation of love to man, it is of the utmost importance for us so to conduct the discussion, that it shall be not only apparent, but incontrovertible, that this is our only motive. Inasmuch as we are endeavoring to convince our fellow men that *they* are chargeable with a violation of the rights of others, we should, in all our intercourse, set them an example of the most delicate regard to *their* rights. He will surely labor with very little success, in the propagation of truth, who commences his efforts by uttering a falsehood. And he will labor with as little success in extending the dominion of right, whose first effort is an act of injustice.

We are bound, then, I apprehend, in all our efforts on this subject, most scrupulously to avoid all measures, which could justly be construed into an attempt to infringe the rights of the South. We have a right to attempt to change Southern opinions on this question, and to show the master, by argument, that it is for his interest, and that it is his duty, to liberate his slave. But we have no right to take any measures of which the na-

tural tendency is, to excite the slaves to insubordination and civil war. We have a right to change the purpose of the master by *argument*, but we have no right either to oblige him by our own *physical* force to change it, or to excite another person thus to oblige him. I here only speak of the question of *right* to do the act, and not at all of the *practical result* of the act. It is my firm belief, that a general insurrection at the south would end, in the almost entire annihilation of the colored population.

Nor, again, can I perceive the utility of a system of societies, affiliated, not for the sake of circulating truth at the South, but for the sake of exciting and agitating the people at the North. The only advantage which can be expected to result from this measure, is the increase of abolition *votes*. But this is a matter, as we have attempted to show, with which *votes* have nothing to do, inasmuch as it is a question, over which, as citizens, we have no control. In the mean time, the very attempt to multiply votes, on this question, cannot but beget in the minds of the South, the suspicion that we intend to interfere in this very manner: that is, in a manner at variance with our constitutional obligations. The least suspicion of this nature, must, from the necessity of the case, render all our argument useless, and make our very appeal to men's un-

derstandings and consciences, a positive annoyance. And in so far as I have been able to discover, such has been the effect of the system of affiliated abolition societies. They have already become the tools of third rate politicians. They have raised a violent agitation, without presenting any definite means of constitutionally accomplishing their object. In the mean time, as combination on the one side, always produces combinations on the other, they have embittered the feelings of the South. They have, for the present, at least, rendered any open and calm discussion of this subject in the slave-holding States utterly impossible. They have rivetted, indefinitely the bonds of the slave, in those very States in which they were, a few years since, falling off; and, every where throughout the South, they have rendered the servitude of the enslaved vastly more rigorous than it ever was before. While, therefore, I would speak with respect of the motives of those of my fellow citizens who are enlisted in abolition societies, (the political intermeddlers both small and great, always excepted,) I must come to the conclusion that their efforts must be unwisely directed, or else they would have led to a more salutary result.

And again. Supposing we abjure all unkindness, and speak only in the spirit of love, it is yet to be remembered that we are only held responsi-

ble for setting the truth before men. They have a right to decide whether they will accept of us as their instructors or not. They have as good a right to their ears, as we have to our tongues. Hence, if they will not hear us, our responsibility is at an end. We have no right to force our instructions upon them, either by conversation, or by lectures, or by the mail. If they still determine to go on, in what we believe to be wrong, we must leave them to God, who is perfectly capable of vindicating his own laws, and executing justice among the children of men. If they will not hear us, the indication is plain, that God does not mean to use *our* instrumentality in the affair. We must retire and leave the case in his hands, and turn our attention to the doing of good, in some other way.

But I do not believe that there is any danger of such a result. Before the present measures were adopted, discussion on the subject of slavery was common at the South. It has never been treated, any where, with greater boldness or ability than it was a few years since, in public debate, in the Virginia House of Delegates, and it was done, then, without offence. When the present agitations have passed away, there is no reason why it should not be treated in the same manner again. The Quakers have always

borne their clear, and decided, and manly testimony against slavery, both by precept and by example; and yet no exception has ever been taken at the course which they have pursued. They have stated explicitly their views on this subject, in their yearly Epistles. They have used no opprobrious epithets, but, in the spirit of love, have addressed themselves to the reason and conscience of their fellow men. I do not believe that a Southern man would take offence, if a copy of their Epistles on this subject, should be sent to every slave-holder in the country. It has not been my good fortune to become acquainted with many of my southern fellow citizens, but with those whom I have known, I have always conversed as freely upon this as I would upon any other subject. It is due to truth to declare, that they have always heard my arguments candidly and kindly, and have never taken offence at the difference, wide as it might be, which existed between us. I do not, therefore, believe that any insuperable obstacle exists to laboring in this cause, in the spirit of love. My confidence in the cause of truth, and justice, and charity, is yet firm and unabated.

Having already extended these remarks far beyond the limit which I had designated, I have barely room to add a few concluding suggestions.

If there be any truth in the doctrine of the preceding essay; I think it will be evident

1. That although I may be convinced that a command has been given by God ; it is yet incumbent on me to inquire what other commands have been given by him which may affect my obligations to perform any particular act, which would generally be comprehended under that command. Unless I do this, I am liable to violate right ; to do evil that good may come ; and thus to plead the authority of God in justification of manifest wrong.

2. If there be this liability to error, it is clearly my duty to do this for myself. It is a duty which I cannot delegate to another. It is a matter between me and my Maker. No one has any right to decide it for me ; nor can I as a moral man, act upon the decision of any one but myself. I am also as much bound to consider the *limitations* which God has fixed to my individual duty, as the general enactment by which any general duty is enjoined. I must take into view my present position, the relations which I at this moment sustain, and the obligations under which I am at this moment placed, in order to decide what is my duty at this moment in respect to any particular command. Unless I diligently seek for all the light which God has thrown upon my



path, and unless I am also willing to be guided by this light, I cannot claim to be his servant, nor can I plead his authority in justification of the course which I pursue. Unless I do thus, he is not responsible for the consequences; and that responsibility, how great soever it may be, rests wholly upon myself.

3. And lastly, if this be so, it will be seen that moral questions cannot be decided by majorities, nor can the law of God be ascertained by the votes of conventions. Every man must give account *of himself* before God. We cannot shift the responsibility of our conduct upon others. Public opinion can make nothing either right or wrong. If we would be the servants of God, we must learn, each one for himself, to ask the question, Lord, what would *thou* have *me* to do? and uninfluenced by fear or by favor, by allure-ment or by opposition, do *that thing*, and *that only*, let others do as they may.









1841

Author

Wayland, Francis

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